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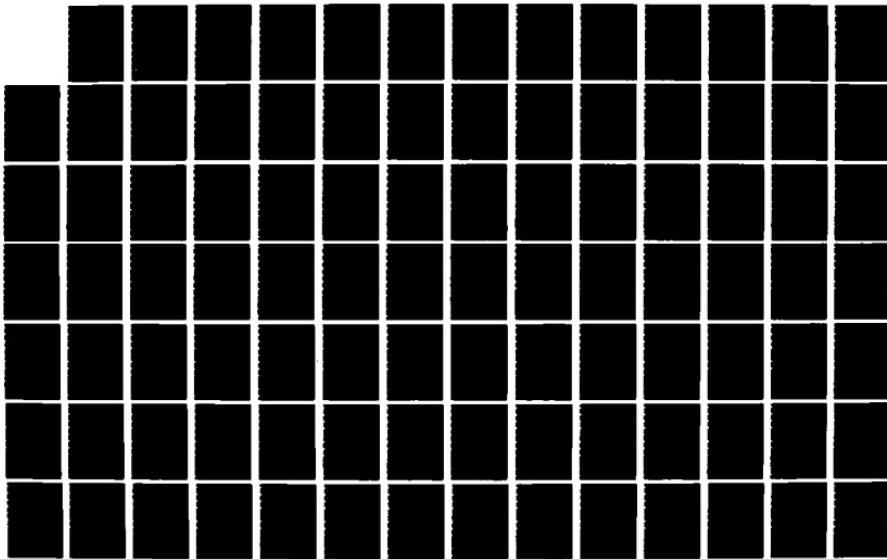
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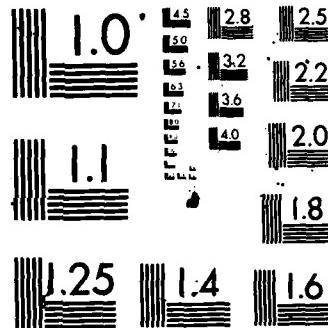
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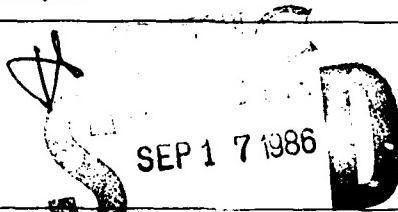
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MOVING DEMOCRACY TO ACTION:  
AGENDA SETTING AND CONSENSUS BUILDING  
IN DEVELOPING RESPONSES TO PERCEIVED SOVIET THREATS

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Louisa, Virginia

A.B., University of North Carolina, 1970  
M.A., University of North Carolina, 1972

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in Candidacy for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

Woodrow Wilson Department of Government & Foreign Affairs  
University of Virginia

May 1986

Kenneth W Thompson  
David Claude Jr  
James S. George  
Norman L. Brown

86 9 16 119

**ABSTRACT:**

**Moving Democracy to Action:  
Agenda Setting And Consensus Building  
In Developing Responses to Perceived Soviet Threats**

by

Samuel Nelson Drew

The need to set the public agenda in such a manner as to build support for foreign affairs and defense initiatives has been a recognized aspect of democratic politics ever since Jefferson drafted the Declaration of Independence with an eye toward "a decent respect for the opinions of mankind." This study examines the struggles to set that agenda which have been associated with efforts to build domestic consensus in support of American defense policies in three cases: NSC-68 in 1950-51; the "missile gap" of the late 1950s; and the "window of vulnerability" which was supposed to open in the early 1980s. The focus of this effort is upon the relative influence of the President, the Congress, opinion elites, foreign powers, and the American mass media in setting the agenda and building consensus in support of specific policies designed to counter what were perceived as increases in the Soviet threat to the security

of the United States in each case. Looking at stages in the development of governmental and public awareness of an increase in the level of the threat as portrayed in the mass media, and subsequently at the success or failure of efforts to counter that threat, this study advances the thesis that while a threat may be placed upon the public agenda by any combination of governmental and non-governmental sources, only the President has the ability to transform this effort into the support which may carry a defense program through to policy execution.

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May 1986

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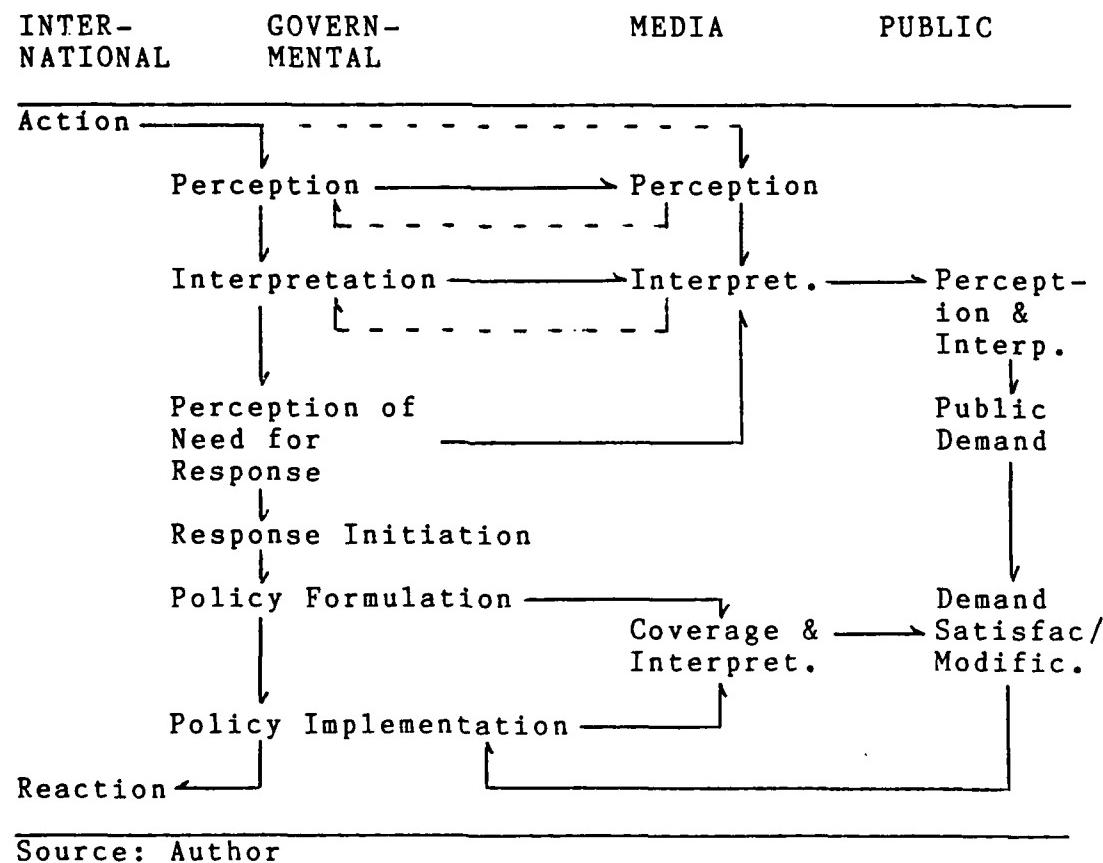
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**APPENDICES**

## APPENDIX I

**A Framework for Consideration of the Relationships  
Among Government, Media, and Public Opinion  
in Developing Policy Responses to International Events**



The model is intended to reflect information and opinion flow in foreign policy decision making in a manner which takes into account the "information conduit," "agenda setting," and "manipulation" models discussed in the text.

Solid lines represent the primary channels of information or opinion flow. Secondary channels are represented by dotted lines.

The categories across the top reflect the different environments within which the agenda setting process occurs. They have been condensed for simplicity of presentation. As the discussion in the text indicates, there are significant distinctions between the different branches of the government, different types of mass media, and different levels of "public" opinion.

It is important to note that the process depicted above does not occur in a vacuum. Actions occurring in the international environment must be perceived against a background of an almost infinite number of other actions occurring simultaneously. This is true for governmental, media and public perceptions. As a result, there is already a relatively full public agenda into which any new perception must be fit. Moreover, actions in the international environment continue throughout the entire process, and may radically alter the nature of the response

being considered or the process by which that response is being developed. Such, for example, was the case with the invasion of Korea as it related to the "sale" of NSC-68, and the invasion of Afghanistan in relation to the "window of vulnerability."

**APPENDIX II****Members of the 1950-1951  
Committee on the Present Danger**

James B. Conant, Chairman  
Tracy S. Voorhees, Vice Chairman  
Julius Ochs Adler                         Raymond B. Allen  
Frank Altschul                             Dillon Anderson  
William Douglas Arant                     James P. Baxter, III  
Laird Bell                                  Barry Bingham  
Harry A. Bullis                             Vannevar Bush  
William L. Clayton                         Robert Cutler  
R. Ammi Cutter                             Mrs. Dwight Davis  
E.L. DeGolyer                              Harold Willis Dodds  
Charles Dollard                             William J. Donovan  
Goldthwaite H. Dorr                         David Dubinsky  
Leonard K. Firestone                         Truman K. Gibson, Jr.  
Miss Meta Glass                              Arthur J. Goldberg  
Samuel Goldwyn                              W.W. Grant  
Edward S. Greenbaum                         Paul G. Hoffman

Monte H. Lemann	William L. Marbury
Stanley Marcus	Dr. William Menninger
Frederick A. Middlebush	James L. Morrill
Edward R. Murrow	John Lord O'Brian
Floyd B. Odlum	J. Robert Oppenheimer
Robert P. Patterson	Howard C. Petersen
Daniel A. Poling	Stanley Resor
Samuel I. Rosenman	Theodore W. Schultz
Robert E. Sherwood	Edgar W. Smith
Robert G. Sproul	Robert L. Stearns
Edmund A. Walsh	W.W. Waymack
Henry M. Wriston	J.D. Zellerbach

-----  
Source: Sanders, Jerry. Peddlers of Crisis; South End Press, Boston; 1983: p. 87.

**APPENDIX III****Statements By President Eisenhower  
In Which He Refuted Claims of a "Missile Gap"**

- 1957:    3 September - Announcement of Soviet ICBM test  
          9 October - 1st Press conference after Sputnik  
          7 November - Address on National Defense  
          13 November -         "         "         "  
1958:    9 January - State of the Union Address  
          13 January - Budget Message  
          31 January - Republican National Committee  
          2 April - Special Message to Congress on Space  
          18 June - Presidential News Conference  
          27 August - Presidential News Conference  
          1 October - Presidential News Conference  
          20 October - Radio/TV Address on Defense Issues  
          21 October - Televised Panel Discussion  
          22 October - Radio/TV Address on Defense Issues  
          31 October - Television Address to the Nation  
          10 December - Presidential News Conference  
1959:    9 January - State of the Union Address

14 January - Remarks to the National Press Club  
19 January - Budget Message  
28 January - Presidential News Conference  
4 February - Presidential News Conference  
16 March - Radio/TV Address on Security  
29 July - Presidential News Conference  
1960: 7 January - State of the Union Address  
13 January - Presidential News Conference  
18 January - Budget Message  
3 February - Presidential News Conference  
11 February - Presidential News Conference  
21 February - Radio/TV Address  
26 July - Address to the Republican Convention  
28 October - Republican Campaign Rally  
1961: 12 January - State of the Union Address  
16 January - Budget Message  
17 January - Farewell Address to the Nation  
18 January - Final Press Conference as President

-----  
Source: Public Papers of the Presidents, 1956-1961.

**APPENDIX IV**  
**PFIAB Members, 1975-1976**

George W. Anderson (Chairman 1975)

Leo Cherne (Chairman 1976)

William O. Baker	John S. Foster, Jr.
Robert W. Galvin	Gordon Gray
Edwin H. Land	Clare Booth Luce
George P. Schultz	Edward Teller
John B. Connally*	Gen. Lyman L. Lemnitzer*
Robert D. Murphy*	Edward Bennett Williams*

\* New members in 1976.

-----  
Source: U.S. Senate. The National Intelligence Estimates  
A-B Team Episode Concerning Soviet Strategic Capability  
and Objectives; 16 February 1968: p. 2.

**APPENDIX V****Founding Board Members and Executive Committee Members****November 1976****The Committee on the Present Danger**

Achilles, Theodore C. Vice Chairman, Atlantic Council;  
Former Counselor of the Department of State.

Allen, Richard V. President, Potomac International  
Corporation; former Deputy Assistant to the President for  
International Economic Affairs.

Allison, John M. Former Ambassador to Japan, Indonesia, and  
Czechoslovakia.

Anderson, Eugenie. Former Ambassador to Denmark.

Bardach, Eugene. Asst. Professor of Public Policy, U. of  
California.

Barnett, Frank R. Pres., National Strategy Information  
Center.

Baroody, Joseph D. Public Affairs Consultant.

Beam, Jacob D. Former Ambassador to Poland, Czechoslovakia,

and the USSR.

Bellow, Saul. 1976 Nobel Prize winner for literature.

Bendetsen, Karl R. Former Undersecretary of the Army.

Bishop, Joseph W. Jr. Professor of Law, Yale.

Bozeman, Adda B. Professor of International Relations,  
Sarah Lawrence College.

Brennan, Donald G. Director of National Security Studies,  
Hudson Institute.

Browne, Vincent J. Professor of Political Science, Howard  
University.

Burgess, W. Randolph. Former Undersecretary of the Treasury  
and Ambassador to NATO.

Cabot, John M. Former Ambassador to the Sudan, Columbia,  
Brazil and Poland.

Campbell, W. Glen. Director, Hoover Institution on War,  
Revolution, and Peace, Stanford University.

Casey, William J. Former Chairman, SEC, Under Secretary of  
State, and President, Export-Import Bank.

Chaikin, Sol C. President, International Ladies' Garment  
Workers' Union.

Clark, Peter B. President, The Evening News Assn.

Cline, Ray S. Director of Studies, Georgetown University Center for International and Strategic Studies.

Cohen, Edwin S. Former Under Secretary of the Treasury.

Colby, William E. Former Director of Central Intelligence.

+ Connally, John B. Former Secretary of the Treasury.

Connell, William. President, Concept Associates Inc. Executive Assistant to Vice President Humphrey.

Connor, John T. President, Allied Chemical Corp.; former Secretary of Commerce.

Darden, Colgate W., Jr. President Emeritus, University of Virginia.

Dean, Arthur H. Former Chairman, U.S. Delegations on Nuclear Test Ban & Disarmament.

Dillon, C. Douglas. Former Secretary of the Treasury.

Dogole, S. Harrison. Chairman, Globe Security Security Systems, Inc.

Dominick, Peter H. Former U.S. Senator.

Dowling, Walter. Former Ambassador to Germany.

DuBrow, Evelyn. Legislative Director, International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union.

DuChessi, William. Executive Vice President, Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers' Union.

Earle, Valerie. Professor of Government, Georgetown University.

Farrell, James T. Author.

Fellman, David. Vilas Professor of Political Science, University of Wisconsin.

Franklin, William H. Chairman of the Board (ret.), Caterpillar Tractor Co.

Frelinghuysen, Peter H. B. Former Member of Congress.

Friedman, Martin L. Assistant to President Truman.

Ginsburgh, Robert N. Major General USAF (ret.); editor, Strategic Review

Glazer, Nathan. Professor of Education and Sociology, Harvard University.

Goodpaster, Andrew J. General US Army (ret.); former NATO commander.

+ Gray, Gordon. Former President, University of North Carolina; and Secretary of the Army.

Gullion, Edmund A. Dean, Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy.

Gunderson, Barbara Bates. Former Civil Service Commissioner.

Handlin, Oscar. University Professor, Harvard.

Hannah, John A. Executive Director, United Nations World Food Council; former Chairman, U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, and Administrator, Agency for International Development.

Harper, David B. Gateway National Bank of St. Louis.

Harris, Huntington. Trustee, The Brookings Institution.

Hauser, Rita E. Attorney, Strook & Strook & Lavan; former Representative to the Human Rights Commission of the United Nations.

Hellmann, Donald C. Professor of Political Science and Asian Studies, University of Washington.

Herrera, Alfred C. Research Associate, Johns Hopkins University, Washington Center of Foreign Policy Research.

Horowitz, Rachelle. Director, Committee on Political Education, American Federation of Teachers.

Hurewitz, J. C. Director, The Middle East Institute, Columbia University.

Johnson, Belton K. Chairman, Chaparrilla Agri-Services, Inc.

Johnson, Chalmers. Professor & Chairman, Department of Political Science, University of California.

Johnston, Whittle. Professor of Government and Foreign Affairs, University of Virginia.

Jordan, David C. Professor and Chairman, Woodrow Wilson Department of Government and Foreign Affairs, University of Virginia.

Kampelman, Max M. Attorney: Fried, Frank, Harris, Shriver & Kampelman.

Kemp, Geoffrey. Professor of International Politics, Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy.

Keyserling, Leon H. President, Conference on Economic Progress; Chairman, Council of Economic Advisors under President Truman.

Kirkland, Lane. Secretary-Treasurer, AFL-CIO.

Kirkpatrick, Jeane J. Professor of Government, Georgetown University.

\* Kohler, Foy D. Professor of International Studies, University of Miami (Fla.); former Ambassador to the Soviet Union.

Krogh, Peter. Dean, School of Foreign Service, Georgetown University.

Lefever, Ernest W. Professor of International Relations and Director, Ethics and Public Policy Program, Georgetown University.

+ Lemnitzer, Lyman L. General, U.S. Army, (ret.); former Chairman, JCS.

Lewis, Hobart. Chairman, Reader's Digest.

Libby, W.F. Former AEC Commissioner; 1960 Nobel Prize for Chemistry.

Liebler, Sarason D. President, Digital Recording Corp.

Linen, James A. Director & Former President, Time Inc.

Lipset, Seymour Martin. Professor of Political Science and Sociology, Stanford University.

Lord, Mary P. Former Representative to the Human Rights

Commission of the United Nations.

Lovestone, Jay. Consultant to the AFL-CIO and ILGWU on International Affairs.

+ Luce, Clare Boothe. Author; former member of Congress, Ambassador to Italy.

Lyons, John H. General President, Ironworkers International Union.

MacNaughton, Donald S. Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, The Prudential Life Insurance Company of America.

Marks, Leonard H. Former Director, USIA.

Marshall, Charles Burton. Johns Hopkins SAIS; former Member, Dept. of State Policy Planning Staff.

Martin, William McChesney, Jr. Former Chairman, Federal Reserve Board.

McCabe, Edward A. Counsel to President Eisenhower.

McCracken, Samuel. Author.

McGhee, George C. Former Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs, Ambassador to Turkey and Germany.

McNair, Robert E. Former Governor of South Carolina.

Miller, John. President, National Planning Association.

Mitchell, George C. Executive Director, World Affairs Council of Pittsburgh.

Morse, Joshua M. Dean, College of Law, Florida State University.

Muller, Steven. President, The Johns Hopkins University.

Mulliken, Robert S. Professor of Chemistry and Physics, University of Chicago. (Nobel Prize in Chemistry, 1966).

Myerson, Bess. Consumer Affairs Consultant, New York City.

Nichols, Thomas S. President, Nichols Co.; former Chairman, Executive Committee, Olin Corp.

\* Nitze, Paul H. Chairman, Advisory Council, SAIS, Johns Hopkins University; former Deputy Secretary of Defense.

O'Brien, William V. Chairman, Department of Government, Georgetown University.

Olmsted, George. Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, International Bank, Washington D.C.

Packard, David. Chairman of the Board, Hewlett-Packard Co.; former Deputy Secretary of Defense.

Payne, James L. Professor of Political Science, Texas A&M University.

Pfaltzgraff, Robert L., Jr. Professor, Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy.

\* Pipes, Richard E. Professor of History and former Director of the Russian Research Center, Harvard University.

Podhoretz, Midge Decter. Author and editor.

Podhoretz, Norman. Editor, "Commentary."

Ra'anan, Uri. Professor of International Politics & Chairman of the International Security Studies Program, Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy.

Ramey, Estelle R. Professor, Department of Physiology, Georgetown University School of Medicine.

Ramsey, Paul. Professor of Religion, Princeton University.

Ridgway, Matthew B. General, US Army (ret.); former Chief of Staff, US Army.

Roche, John P. Professor, Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy; Special Consultant to President Johnson.

Rose, H. Chapman. Former Undersecretary of the Treasury.

Rosenblatt, Peter R. Attorney.

Rostow, Eugene V. Professor of Law, Yale Law School; former Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs.

Rowe, James H., Jr. Administrative Assistant to President Roosevelt.

Rusk, Dean. Professor, School of Law, The University of Georgia; former Secretary of State.

Rustin, Bayard. President, A. Phillip Randolph Institute.

Saltzman, Charles E. Partner, Goldman, Sachs & Co.; former Undersecretary of State for Administration.

Scaife, Richard M. Publisher, Tribune-Review

Schifter, Richard. Attorney, Fried, Frank, Harris, Shriver & Kampelman.

Seabury, Paul. Professor of Political Science, University of California.

Shanker, Albert. President, American Federation of Teachers.

Skacel, Milan B. President, Chamber of Commerce of Latin America in the USA.

Smith, Fred. Chairman, Board of Trustees, National Planning

Association; former Assistant to the Secretary of the Treasury.

Smith, Lloyd H. Paraffine Oil Corporation.

Spang, Kenneth. International Business Adviser - Citibank.

Straus, Ralph I. Director, Atlantic Council of the United States.

Sweatt, Harold W. Former Chairman of the Board, Honeywell, Inc.

Tanham, George K. Vice President and Trustee, the RAND Corporation.

Taylor, Hobart Jr. Former Director, Export-Import Bank.

Taylor, Maxwell D. General, US Army (ret.); former Chairman of the JCS.

+ Teller, Edward. Professor Emeritus, University of California.

Temple, Arthur. Chairman of the Board, President and Chief Executive Officer, Temple-Eastex, Inc.

Turner, J.C. General President, International Union of Operating Engineers.

Tyroler, Charles, II. President, Quadri-Science, Inc.;

former Director of Manpower Supply, Department of Defense.

\* Van Cleave, William R. Professor of International Relations, University of Southern California.

Walker, Charles E. Charles E. Walker Associates, Inc.; former Deputy Secretary of the Treasury.

Ward, Martin J. President, Plumbers' and Pipe Fitters' International Union.

Ward, Robert E. Director, Center for Research in International Studies, Stanford University.

Weaver, Paul S. President, Lake Erie College.

Whalen, Richard J. Author and Journalist.

Wigner, Eugene P. Theoretical Physicist, Princeton University (Nobel Prize in Physics, 1963).

Wilcox, Francis O. Director General, Atlantic Council of the United States; former Assistant Secretary of State; former Chief of Staff, Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

Wolfe, Bertram D. Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Russian History, University of California; Senior Research Fellow, Hoover Institution on War, Revolution,

and Peace, Stanford University.

Zumwalt, Elmo R. Admiral, US Navy (ret.); former Chief of Naval Operations.

-----

+ Member of the PFIAB involved with the creation of Team B.

\* Member of the Team B intelligence assessment group.

Sources: Tyroler, Charles II. Alerting America; Pergamon-Brassey's, Washington D.C.; 1984: pp. 5-9; and Sanders, Jerry. Peddlers of Crisis; South End Press, Boston; 1983: pp. 154-160.

**APPENDIX VI****Committee on the Present Danger Members****Serving in the Reagan Administration, November 1981**

Ronald Reagan: President of the United States.

Kenneth Adelman: Deputy Representative to the United Nations.

Richard V. Allen: Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs.

Martin Anderson: Assistant to the President for Policy Development.

James L. Buckley: Undersecretary of State.

W. Glenn Campbell: Chairman, Intelligence Oversight Board, and member PFIAB.

William J. Casey: Director of Central Intelligence.

John B. Connally: Member, PFIAB.

Joseph D. Douglass, Jr.: Assistant Director, ACDA.

John S. Foster, Jr.: Member, PFIAB.

Amoretta M. Hoeber: Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Army.

Fred Charles Ikle: Under Secretary of Defense for Policy.

Max M. Kampelman: Chairman, U.S. CSCE Delegation.

Geoffrey Kemp: National Security Council Staff.

Jeane J. Kirkpatrick: Representative to the U.N.

John F. Lehman: Secretary of the Navy.

Clare Booth Luce: Member, PFIAB.

Paul H. Nitze: Chief Negotiator for talks on Theater Nuclear Forces.

Edward F. Noble: Chairman, U.S. Synthetic Fuels Corp.

Michael Novak: Representative, UNESCO Human Rights Commission.

Peter O'Donnell, Jr.: Member PFIAB.

Richard Perle: Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Policy.

Richard Pipes: National Security Council staff.

Eugene V. Rostow: Director, ACDA.

Paul Seabury: Member PFIAB.

Gerge P. Schultz: Chairman, President's Economic Policy Advisory Board.

R.G. Stilwell: Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Policy.

Robert Strausz-Hupe: Ambassador to Turkey.

Charles Tyrolier II: Member Intelligence Oversight Board.

William R. Van Cleave: Chairman-designate, General Advisory Committee, ACDA.

Charls E. Walker: Member, President's Economic Policy Advisory Board.

Seymour Weiss: Member, PFIAB.

Edward Bennett Williams: Member, PFIAB.

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Source: The New York Times; 23 November 1981: p. 20.

By 1984, 28 additional members of the Committee on the Present Danger had been appointed to positions in the Reagan administration. For a full list see Charles Tyrolier II (ed.), Alerting America; Pergamon-Brassey, Washington D.C.; 1984: pp. ix-xi.

## APPENDIX VII

### Members of the Committee on MX Basing (The Townes Commission)

Dr. Charles H. Townes: Professor of Physics, University of California at Berkeley.

Admiral Worth Bagley, USN (ret.): former Vice Chief of Naval Operations.

Dr. Solomon Buchsbaum: Vice President, Bell Telephone Laboratories.

General Andrew Goodpaster, USA: Superintendent, United States Military Academy, and former Supreme Allied Commander, Europe.

Professor William Nierenberg: Head, Scripps Oceanographic Institute.

David Packard: Chairman of the Board, Hewlett-Packard Co.; former Deputy Secretary of Defense.

Professor Henry Rowen: Stanford University; Chairman, National Intelligence Council.

General Bernard Schriever, USAF (ret.): former Director, USAF ICBM Development Programs.

General Brent Scowcroft, USAF: former National Security Advisor.

Dr. Albert Wheelon: Vice President, Hughes Aircraft Corp.

James Woolsey: former Undersecretary of the Navy and SALT delegation advisor.

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Source: U.S. House of Representatives.

Strategic Programs; Hearings before the Committee on Armed Services; 97th Congress, 2nd Session; 6 October 1981 - 1 March 1982; USGPO, Washington D.C.; 1982: p. 176.

**APPENDIX VIII**  
**The Scowcroft Commission**

**Commission members:**

Brent Scowcroft, Chairman	Nicholas F. Brady
William Clements	John M. Deutch
Alexander M. Haig, Jr.	Richard Helms
John H. Lyons	William Perry
Thomas C. Reed	Levering Smith
R. James Woolsey	

**Senior Counselors:**

Harold Brown	Lloyd N. Cutler
Henry A. Kissinger	Melvin R. Laird
John McCone	Donald H. Rumsfeld
James R. Schlesinger	

-----  
Source: Report of the President's Commission on Strategic Forces, Cover letter, 6 April 1983.

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Security Organization. Report Prepared for the Commission on Organization of the Executive Branch. Washington D.C.; USGPO.

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## Section I

### Agenda Setting and Consensus Building: The Government-Mass Media Connection

"At what point shall we Americans expect the approach of danger? By what means shall we fortify against it?"

Abraham Lincoln

#### 1. Fortifying Against the Approach of Danger

Ever since Thomas Jefferson expressed the view that a "decent respect to the opinions of mankind" required a public declaration of American independence from Great Britain, Americans have tended to associate the idea of public consensus with the concept of effective foreign policy in a democratic society. Jefferson himself, writing to Richard Henry Lee nearly fifty years after the drafting of the Declaration of Independence, affirmed that one of the primary objectives of the Declaration was to build just such a consensus: "This was the object of the Declaration," he wrote, "...to place before mankind the common sense of the subject, in terms so plain and firm as to command their assent...in the independent stand we [were] compelled to take."<sup>1</sup>

Over 150 years later, there is ample evidence that efforts to build consensus by placing critical items of the American foreign policy agenda before the public "in terms so plain and firm as to command their assent" are still viewed as a requisite foundation for a viable foreign policy by both those who observe and those who shape America's course in foreign affairs. One recent study of "Foreign Policy and Domestic Consensus" opens with the observation that "For a democratic polity to sustain a coherent foreign policy, a relatively broad and stable domestic consensus is essential."<sup>2</sup> A political action group seeking to counter what it perceives as a drifting of American policy since Vietnam issues a call to "build a fresh consensus to expand the opportunities and diminish the dangers of a world in flux."<sup>3</sup> Even a top secret government document drafted at the start of the "cold war" expresses the view that "the full power which resides within the American people will be evoked" only when it becomes "possible for the American people and the American Government to arrive at a consensus."<sup>4</sup>

The corollary to each of these examples, from Jefferson to the present, is that in the absence of such a consensus it is difficult to move a democratic society to act effectively in the arena of foreign affairs. This perception has been a point of concern for observers of the

democratic process for years. It is reflected in Alexis de Tocqueville's observation that "foreign politics demand scarcely any of those qualities which are peculiar to democracy; they demand, on the contrary, the perfect use of almost all those in which it is deficient."<sup>5</sup> De Tocqueville was primarily concerned with the conflict between the requirements of building the public consensus demanded by democratic theory and the demands for secrecy and patience which he associated with successful foreign policy. Louis Halle, noting the need for consensus not just among the public but also among the executive and legislative branches of government, concurred, writing that "the fact is that the American Government is about as badly designed for the conduct of foreign affairs as it could be."<sup>6</sup>

De Tocqueville, writing over 100 years before Halle, suggested that it was too soon to tell whether the American experience might reveal "talents...in conducting the state's foreign affairs" which would compensate for the problems he believed to be inherent in any democratic approach to international politics.<sup>7</sup> Halle's more specific critique of the process of foreign policy-making as conducted by the United States suggests that the American experience instead may have revealed additional difficulties in the basic task of consensus-building for foreign policy initiatives. Moreover, the emergence of the

United States and the Soviet Union as confrontational "superpowers" in the years following the second World War has lent a sense of urgency to the problem. Unfortunately, building a consensus in support of American foreign policy initiatives during periods of tension short of an actual attack on the United States or its forces has proven to be a task not necessarily susceptible to acceleration by this same sense of urgency. As a column in the editorial pages of the New York Times recently observed, "Democracies, unfortunately, tend not to act until it is dangerously late. Democracies fight wars effectively, and even prepare for wars with surprising efficiency. But they find it remarkably difficult to decide to begin to prepare...."<sup>8</sup>

The obvious concern is that in an age of nuclear weapons we can no longer afford the luxury of delaying our preparations until after an attack has generated the required consensus. Some other means of moving the country to action must be found, some means by which the support necessary to sustain a coherent defense policy can be generated short of the outbreak of war. Ironically, it would seem that in the years since World War II, the pressing questions confronting those charged with creating such policies are strikingly similar to those posed by Abraham Lincoln nearly 150 years ago, when he asked "At what point shall we Americans expect the approach of

danger? By what means shall we fortify against it?"<sup>9</sup>

It is toward the provision of an answer to Lincoln's questions as they apply to post-World War II American foreign policy that this present study is directed. Specifically, the following pages will offer an examination of three cases during the post-war period in which there were major attempts to build consensus in support of a foreign policy agenda which called upon the country to "fortify against" the imminent approach of a period of danger from the Soviet Union. The first of these came in the wake of the explosion of the first Soviet atomic bomb, and centered around the adoption of NSC-68 as the basis for American efforts to contain the Soviet threat. The second followed the testing of the first Soviet ICBM and the subsequent launching of Sputnik, resulting in American efforts to close a "missile gap" in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The most recent period emerged from fears that the USSR had used the period of detente to build up its strategic striking power to the point where America faced a "window of vulnerability" in the mid 1980s.<sup>10</sup>

Each of these cases shares certain elements with the others. Most strikingly, in each case the attempt to answer the question of "at what point shall we Americans expect the approach of danger" was tied to a belief that

the Soviet Union would soon enjoy a military advantage over the United States, but that preparations to avoid that danger would have to be initiated during a period in which there was initially no direct and immediate threat to the United States which might naturally be expected to mobilize the population. Another major similarity is to be found in the efforts to answer Lincoln's second question. The response to "by what means shall we fortify against" the anticipated threat in all three instances was associated with pressure for increased defense spending on specific strategic programs which represented challenges to the existing spending priorities articulated by the executive branch. As a result, participants in the governmental decision-making process who already "expected the approach of danger" saw a need to provide information about the nature of the threat to the public, in an effort to bring public pressure to bear on branches of the government which resisted shifting from those existing priorities.<sup>11</sup>

Ultimately, in each case, the debate over both the nature of the threat and the appropriate response came to be carried out upon a very public stage with a correspondingly intense barrage of mass media coverage. It is the relationship among the actors involved in this effort to build and use public consensus about the nature of the Soviet threat which forms the focal point for this

analysis. In particular, this study addresses the issue of the relative influence of the executive branch, the Congress, opinion elites both in and out of government, and the mass media themselves in setting the agenda for public discussion during what Robert H. Johnson has described as "periods of peril," which have been marked by efforts to build consensus in response to perceptions of an increasing Soviet threat.<sup>12</sup>

The central thesis advanced here is that the crucial linkage in this process is the ability to set the agenda in the mass media in such a manner as to influence the development of a public consensus on, first, the nature of the threat, and second, what should be done about it. Such a public consensus, however, is not sufficient to move governmental policy on its own. It provides those seeking to move that policy with a major tool which can be used to attempt to forge a consensus within the government, upon which it may then be possible to build a sustainable long-term policy. The evidence associated with the three case studies which follow suggests that no single actor or group is able to dominate this agenda setting process to the extent that it alone enjoys the power to "command" a consensus. However, it also suggests that in some circumstances, it may be possible for the executive alone to resist the formation of a consensus against it. This

power would appear to stem from the unique relationship which exists between the executive branch and the mass media in setting the agenda for national attention in the field of American foreign policy.

The fact that the President is generally considered to be the most newsworthy individual in this country gives him a significant amount of leverage in dealing with the news media. The timing of presidential events, the scheduling of his activities, and the perceived level of direct presidential involvement with an issue all can be used to attract media attention to a story, and to a lesser extent, to distract attention from stories that the President wishes to downplay. The focus on the President tends to be even greater when the issue involved is foreign affairs. As Doris Graber observed in her study of Mass Media and American Politics, "the bulk of all foreign affairs news for the American media actually originates in Washington...from the executive branch."<sup>13</sup>

In the years since WW II, there has been a considerable expansion of the executive staff dedicated to enhancing the ability of the President to use this media attention to his best advantage. One study even goes so far as to state that "the recent history of the office of the President is in large part a history of the expansion of the resources

that presidents have to get their messages to the public."<sup>14</sup> At the start of Franklin Roosevelt's administration, White House relations with the six or seven news reporters who regularly covered the President were handled on a part time basis by one secretary. By the time Ronald Reagan assumed the Presidency, the White House Press Office consisted of a staff of over 30, and was dealing with a White House press corps of over 60 regular reporters plus cameramen and other technicians.<sup>15</sup> As Michael Grossman and Martha Joynt Kumar put it in their analysis of The White House and the News Media, "the combined efforts of the White House and the networks have made the President the single biggest continuing story on television news. The labor involved in the networks' massive coverage of his activities is equalled by the large scale efforts of the White House to influence what television portrays."<sup>16</sup> The same magnitude of effort can also be said to apply to the print media.

Despite the impact of the chief executive on the agenda of the mass media, one often hears the press itself described in terms which imply a tremendous impact on the shaping of the national agenda. Such power is often linked to the belief, cited by Urs Schwartz in his article on "The Impact of the News Media on the Conduct of Foreign Policy," that "it is the...press that has made democracy possible in

large countries." Schwartz goes on to observe that "for many, the media have almost become the equivalent of democracy," and that in many cases, "the term 'public opinion' is often used as a synonym for the term 'the press.'<sup>17</sup>" Theodore H. White is even more dramatic, describing the power of the mass media in setting the political agenda for action by the American government as "primordial." The press, he states:

...sets the agenda of public discussion. It determines what people will talk and think about - an authority that in other nations is reserved for tyrants....No major act...no foreign adventure, no act of diplomacy...can succeed in the United States unless the press prepares the public mind. And when the press seizes a great issue to thrust onto the agenda, it moves action on its own.<sup>18</sup>

Such sweeping views of the power of the media have gained considerable following in the years since Vietnam became America's first "television war." For example, a poll of "five hundred leading citizens" in April of 1974 rated television as the greatest influence on decisions and actions affecting the nation as a whole.<sup>19</sup> Such views bear within them the echoes of the oft-quoted statement by Thomas Jefferson that "the basis of our government being the opinion of the people, the very first object should be to keep that right, and were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers, or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate a

moment to choose the latter."<sup>20</sup>

Mr. Jefferson's faith in the ability of the press to provide a sound basis for democratic decision-making notwithstanding, there is little in the way of empirical evidence to support the view that the media are capable of actually exercising the sort of sweeping power which some would ascribe to them today. In fact, the role played by the mass media and public opinion in the formation of American foreign policy has proven to be a fairly elusive one to define. There is, to be sure, no lack of expressed opinion on the issue. It is a rare government leader in this country who has not at some point in his or her career commented upon the importance (or lack thereof) of generating media and public support for crucial policy decisions. The same might well be said for leading members of the press. Yet careful studies of the exact nature of the relationship assumed by such comments are scarce. Moreover, the studies that do exist do not appear to agree among themselves.

Some studies of the relationship reflect the Jeffersonian model and refer to the media as conduits of information, providing the basis upon which informed public opinion can be generated and then translated into action by a responsive government.<sup>21</sup> Others, echoing Theodore H. White,

see the media as a power unto themselves, creating public opinion and setting an agenda which both constrains and demands government action.<sup>22</sup> Yet a third view, noting the influence of the executive branch over the media agenda, describes the media as part of the "establishment," working with or used by the government to create public opinion which supports policies already determined within closed government circles.<sup>23</sup>

The point of view which is by far the most widely expressed among those working within the media is that which depicts the media as relatively neutral channels of information to the public. This is the view which Bernard Cohen describes as "the classic justification in American democratic thought for a free press."<sup>24</sup> The central thrust of its thesis is that for the democratic process to work, the government must be able to follow the lead of informed public opinion in developing policy, and that such opinion will provide the support necessary to execute that policy. A television documentary on "The Press and the People," produced in the late 1950s by WGBH, Boston, captured the essence of this argument in its introduction:

Today and every day, the American people must make decisions on which their whole survival may depend. To make sound decisions the people must be informed. For this, they depend on the nation's free press.<sup>25</sup>

The concept of a direct linkage between such decisions by the "American people" and the foreign policies of their government has been clearly stated by public opinion pollster George Gallup, who writes that "the foreign policy of a democracy cannot be successfully carried on for very long unless the policy-makers continually consult public opinion. This simple truth has sometimes been neglected at great cost."<sup>26</sup> Support for this interpretation of the role of public opinion in the foreign policy process is also often reflected in the statements of prominent public officials. In August of 1949, for example, President Harry Truman opened the news conference announcing the Soviet acquisition of the atomic bomb by asserting that:

My primary purpose...is to ensure that our policy shall be based on informed and intelligent public opinion. This is the way in which our system of government acquires its strength.... In this nation, foreign policy is not made by the decisions of a few. It is the result of the democratic process, and represents the collective judgement of the people.<sup>27</sup>

Twenty-eight years later, President Jimmy Carter expressed virtually the same sentiment in an address to the graduating class at Notre Dame University, proclaiming that:

I believe we can have a foreign policy that is democratic...that the American people both support...know about, and understand.... We are confident of the good sense of the American people, and so we let them share in the process of making foreign policy decisions. We can thus

speak with the voices of 215 million, and not just an isolated handful.<sup>28</sup>

Although the logic which supports this concept may appear to be sound, there are some serious problems with this "classic justification" as a model to explain the relationships among the branches of government, the media, and the public in the development of American foreign policy. To begin with, on most matters of foreign policy there is evidence that the bulk of the American public is neither informed nor interested. As one recent study observes, "in no area of public policy are most Americans so ill-informed and unconcerned as in foreign policy."<sup>29</sup> This certainly seems to be the view of news editors in this country, who, according to Doris Graber, "routinely judge audience interest in foreign news to be below interest in local and national news, sports, and comics."<sup>30</sup>

The opinions of these editors are critical, because they act upon their views to decide what news to print and broadcast. On an average, only 11% of all stories in American newspapers and 16% of all nightly newscast items are devoted to foreign affairs.<sup>31</sup> Such a level of interest and available information hardly seems compatible with the needs of a people who must daily "make decisions on which their whole survival may depend." In fact, as most studies of foreign policy decision-making indicate, "the American

people" as a whole are rarely, if ever, directly involved in making such decisions. Those decisions are made by their elected and appointed representatives in Washington, who may or may not be considering public opinion at the time they are making them.

This is not to say that such decision-makers are unconcerned with public opinion. They are likely to follow the results of public opinion polls with great interest, and frequently see themselves as being limited in their choice of options by the existing "mood" of the country reflected in such polls. Still, the extent of such limits should not be overestimated. As Ralph Levering observed in his study of "the public and American foreign policy," those who place undue stress on the limiting aspects of public pressure "have tended to overlook the strong influence that governmental officials can have on public opinion."<sup>32</sup> The process of consensus building involves efforts both to use existing public opinion to shape governmental policy and to use governmental influence on the agenda setting process to shape public opinion.

Most decision-makers, moreover, are also aware of the distinction between "mass opinion," as reflected in the polls, and informed opinion.<sup>33</sup> Especially during the early stages of the agenda setting process, the views which these

individuals are most likely to consider are those which exist among what have come to be called "opinion elites." These groups consist of the relatively small segment of the population who make a point both of following foreign policy issues as they develop and of making their opinions on those issues known. As described in one recent study of the roles of mass media and public opinion in the democratic foreign policy process, "extensive research conducted in this field shows that news and comment related to foreign affairs arouse the interest of a relatively small section of the whole audience. This section, however, is that which, through the working of the democratic process, will finally have a bearing on the foreign policy decisions of the government agencies."<sup>34</sup> In some cases, the members of this "opinion elite" may include prominent columnists and broadcast journalists from within the media establishment itself. In other instances, citizens groups and lobbyists may constitute the core of "informed public opinion" on an issue. Only rarely, however, will the mass public on its own initiative seize upon an issue as a result of information in the press and create the sort of pressure which demands a response from the government.

While those within the news industry may be most prone to describe their role as that of creating an informed public,

the model which is most often reflected in the statements of those charged with making foreign policy decisions tends to resemble more closely the "agenda-setting" view of the media. They see the press as setting an agenda for public discussion and government action through the use of its influence to establish which issues and values are important at any given point in time. The media are said to enjoy this power by virtue of their ability to determine what is and what is not "news." The core of this point of view is reflected in the belief that, as Bernard Cohen puts it:

Generally...the world of foreign policy reaches us - or those of us who are interested and attentive - via the media of mass communication....And if we do not see a story in the newspapers (or catch it on radio or television), it effectively has not happened so far as we are concerned.<sup>35</sup>

The crucial implication of this model, as far as government policy-makers are concerned, is that the agenda thus set by the media may or may not be conducive to the policies those within the government are attempting to pursue. In recent years, in fact, the dominant view among many government officials has been that the media agenda is more often than not openly hostile to the priorities of the administration. Hamilton Jordan, for example, reflecting upon his years as President Carter's White House Chief of Staff, expressed bitterness that one legacy of Vietnam and

Watergate was a widespread impression that "these events somehow proved that the press was always right and the President was always wrong." According to Jordan, the subsequent growth of journalistic cynicism toward the presidency "forever altered the ability of the President to reach the public which elected him."<sup>36</sup> Such views are not, however, entirely new. Even Thomas Jefferson, whose earlier defense of the free press is so often quoted by those who work within the mass media, was moved after one term in the Presidency to complain that "the artillery of the press has been levelled against us, charged with whatsoever its licentiousness could devise or dare. These abuses of an institution so important to freedom...are deeply to be regretted, inasmuch as they tend to lessen its usefulness."<sup>37</sup> As columnist James Reston has observed, "the conflict between the men who make and the men who report the news is as old as time. News may be true, but it is not truth, and reporters and officials seldom see it the same way."<sup>38</sup>

It is generally in the interest of governmental decision-makers to attempt to bridge this gap in perception of the "truth" by working to make their agenda and the media agenda coincide. Especially in cases in which those in the government perceive that their policy will require some level of direct public support to succeed, such as

through payment of increased taxes or allowing the construction of military facilities in their home states, a major portion of the governmental program may have to concern itself with the process of agenda setting. This is clearly the case in the three studies which follow, although it is worth noting that the actors most involved in seeking to set the public agenda through media coverage are different in each instance. In the early 1950s, the case for NSC-68 originally was being pushed from within the State Department, but gradually came to be the agenda advocated by the entire executive branch. The agenda of the "missile gap," on the other hand, was pushed most heavily by Congressional committees and some top Air Force officers, but never enjoyed the support of the Eisenhower presidency. Finally, efforts to set an agenda supporting the concept of a "window of vulnerability" began outside of the governmental sphere, primarily among political action groups formed by former members of the executive branch. Eventually, this effort came to be associated most strongly with the Reagan administration, once the "outsiders" resumed their governmental careers as Reagan appointees.

The degree to which the President or Congress have been successful in getting their agendas adopted by the media forms the foundation for the view that the media, and through them public opinion, may be manipulated by the

government. While this view is seldom articulated by those in either the media or government circles, it is a frequently cited concern of both scholars and "concerned citizens."<sup>39</sup> This "manipulated press" model is virtually the opposite of the view that the press exercises the "primordial" power described by Theodore H. White, and the debate between these two camps is at times intense. Generally, those who see the media as being subject to manipulation are more concerned with Presidential than Congressional power, as reflected in James Reston's claim that "the President almost always has the initiative over both the press and the Congress if he chooses to use the instruments at his command."<sup>40</sup> George Gallup, on the other hand, rejects this concept with the argument that "the record does not bear out the idea of so many civil and military leaders who...believe that they can manipulate public opinion."<sup>41</sup>

As is often the case with such seemingly diametrically opposed positions, there are crucial elements in both the "informed public" and the "agenda setting" models which contribute directly to an understanding of the conditions under which government efforts to influence the media agenda become possible. To the extent that the media feel obligated to serve as information channels to the public, what the government is planning to do is news, and those

who are charged with making foreign policy decisions are therefore news sources. Since most of the foreign policy news published or broadcast in the United States actually originates in Washington, a symbiotic relationship exists between foreign affairs correspondents and foreign policy-makers in the Washington community.<sup>42</sup> Those in the government need the media to place their agenda items before the public and opinion elites. The reporters need the information their sources can supply. The result may appear to be collusion between the government and the media to manipulate public opinion, but it often is merely the outcome of a competitive news gathering process. As one candid news columnist observed, "if you have a policy, you have something to sell that makes a good story for a reporter."<sup>43</sup>

Neither side in this relationship is above using the other in the pursuit of its own goals. The media have their leaks and "unnamed sources" within the government which allow them to cover "news" that is in opposition to the officially promoted government policy. As Bernard Cohen observes, one of the features inherent in the American concept of a free press is that "here the media may be used to sustain the position of any holder of power anywhere in the system; they may be used as effectively against an administration as on behalf of one."<sup>44</sup> The

government, on the other hand, may seek to suppress information, plant stories with friendly journalists, or engage in "deliberate leaks" to get its point across. Both are able to justify their actions by reference to a "public mandate." The media point to their obligation to provide the "truth" to the public as a crucial part of the democratic process. Those in government, however, point with equal vigor to their obligation to lead the country - an obligation which demands that they be able to take their case to the American people through the media. Both interpretations are well founded.

In fact, as should be evident by now, many of the apparent contradictions among these different perceptions of the relationship among government, media, and public opinion are no more than different perspectives on the same phenomenon. In much the same manner as that reflected in the story of the three blind men trying to describe an elephant, each of these impressions has an element of truth, but none of them has captured the whole picture. The view of the media as "information conduits" supporting the democratic process by informing the public is valid if for no other reason than the fact that many government and public leaders believe in it and act on the basis of those beliefs. The language used by Presidents Truman and Carter in the passages quoted earlier is testimony to this fact.

The concept of "agenda setting" is also an important aspect of the relationship, but it is clearly a role shared by the media, the government, and opinion elites: The media have the power to decide what stories are important; the government has the power to create the stories; and opinion elites have demonstrated the capability to raise an issue to the point at which it becomes a matter demanding government or media attention. In this same context, the executive does seem to have the initiative in providing leadership for public opinion. Such initiative may be viewed as "manipulation" by some, but it is constrained by the fact that there are other voices which also have access to the public through the mass media. What is needed, it would appear, is some framework which attempts to bring all of these elements together so that the completed picture looks more like an "elephant," and less like "a snake, a rope, and a tree."

A preliminary effort at such a framework should begin by recognizing that the relative influence of the branches of government, the mass media, opinion elites and public opinion vary considerably, depending upon the point in the foreign policy decision-making process at which they are considered.<sup>45</sup> Most foreign policy decisions are founded upon perceptions of events or situations in the international environment which are interpreted as either

providing an opportunity for furthering the "national interests" or demanding a response to protect those interests. At the early stages in this process, much of the initiative is clearly with those in the government, who may in fact be the initial source of the "news" of the external event to the media.<sup>46</sup>

Once an event is perceived, both those within the government and the media need to form some interpretation of its significance: the government, from the point of view of the "national interests" (which may include the effect of the event on public support for government positions or on the ability to secure the election of those who will support such positions); the media from the perspective of whether or not the event is newsworthy. Again, the government plays a significant role in the media decision, for if a government spokesman describes an event as significant, it is a virtual certainty that the government statement will receive news coverage. Thus both the government and the media play a role in setting the agenda for public discussion. Where conflicts between the governmental and media agendas emerge, it is usually not because the government is unable to get its items on the media agenda, but because other sources have provided the media with significant agenda items that are competing with those desired by the administration.

Note that the mass public has not been mentioned until this point. That is because, as has been previously noted, the public is unlikely to find out about a foreign affairs event until the media have interpreted it as newsworthy. While it is clearly possible for the government to reach certain opinion elites directly, in order to mobilize mass public opinion the media are indispensable. As a result, the setting of the public agenda is a process which involves the perception and interpretation of events by both the government and the media.

In the context of this "shared" agenda setting role, the media are seen to function primarily as informational "gatekeepers". This implies that agenda items may be generated by a multitude of sources, but that the process of determining which of them are newsworthy serves as a powerful filter for public perceptions of that agenda. To the extent that public support is necessary to generate action on a particular item, the media thus exert a powerful influence on the agenda for government action. Moreover, the media do more than simply identify issues. They also provide cues to the public about the degree of importance attached to an issue, by virtue of the amount of time or space given to a news item, and the type of presentation (or packaging) the item receives.<sup>47</sup>

The general public is not the only audience which picks up these cues. Especially in the area of foreign affairs, many members of the government depend on the media for a substantial portion of their information. As at least one State Department official has candidly observed, "the first thing we do is read the newspaper....You can't work in the State Department without the New York Times."<sup>48</sup> Other studies report similar findings among many members of Congress.<sup>49</sup> Doris Graber notes that John Kennedy found that foreign affairs stories often reached him 24 hours earlier through the media than they did through State Department channels.<sup>50</sup> In the Carter administration, the President not only regularly read daily press dispatches and news bulletins, but frequently passed them on with his comments for action by his staff.<sup>51</sup> Clearly then, the media not only serve to let the public know what the foreign policy agenda is, but may contribute to establishing that agenda among members of the "political elite" within the government itself.

A crucial factor in understanding the impact of the media on foreign policy decision making, especially in the context of agenda setting just described, is the nature of the "filter" used by the media to determine what is and is not newsworthy. Most studies of the nature of these filters find that they relate more to audience appeal than

to some intrinsic weight of significance attached to the story itself. Doris Graber, using interviews with numerous press and broadcast editors, and content analysis of the stories actually selected for presentation, has identified five criteria which generally appear to be used to choose "news" stories. These are the impact of the event on the lives of the audience, the degree of conflict or violence, involvement of familiar people and places, relationship to things "close to home," and a combination of novelty and timeliness.<sup>52</sup> Such filters are necessary because, regardless of the medium, there is a limited amount of space and time available for journalists to present the news. Television broadcasters have only a 22 to 23 minute time frame in which to present the normal weeknight newscast. Newspapers are somewhat less constrained, but still limited by the amount of advertising they must sell to keep in business.

Moreover, the setting of an agenda for public discussion does not occur in a vacuum. Agenda items are not written on a blank slate. Room must be found for them among any number of other items which have already been placed on the agenda by government and media action. Thus, by the time the government's agenda is presented to the public, it may be in competition not only with other agenda items selected by the press, but with previous items presented to the

public by the government as well.

The conflict which can result from such a situation becomes particularly apparent at the next stage of the foreign policy process, as those who perceive an approaching threat in the context of the events taking their place on the foreign policy agenda attempt to develop a response to the threat and secure support for that response. If the public agenda and governmental agenda are in agreement at this point, then the administration can use its public support both as an internal tool to secure bipartisan backing for its recommendations, and as an instrument of international relations to provide added credibility to its position. If, however, the two agendas are out of synchronization with one another, the public demands for action on previous or competing agenda items may pose serious problems for an administration attempting to formulate and implement its policy options. Such agenda conflict was a central feature of each of the three cases selected for examination in this study.

It is this concept of "agendas in conflict" which structures the following efforts to bring evidence to bear on the process of consensus building in response to perceived increases in the Soviet threat. Each of the three case studies begins with an analysis of the "public

"agenda" as presented in the mass media during the period immediately prior to the emergence of the perception of a "threat." By focusing on the news coverage of Soviet and American strategic postures as presented in the New York Times, the Washington Post, the major popular weekly news magazines (particularly Time, Newsweek, and U.S. News and World Report), and, for the later cases, television news coverage as reflected in the Vanderbilt Television News Archives Indices, it is possible to trace the development of each "threat" as a major news story, and to observe the extent to which this story is portrayed as supporting or conflicting with the government's existing public agenda.

Evidence concerning the development of an agenda within the government (at variance or in harmony with the agenda presented in the mass media) is provided from accounts of the participants, and from the substantial amount of documentation found in public records of government actions, such as Congressional hearings, the material released by the government in the volumes of Foreign Relations of the United States, the Public Papers of the Presidents, and the Department of State Bulletin. By comparing the timing and content of governmental decisions regarding the perception of a threat and the development of a response with the news coverage afforded to each of the three cases, it becomes possible to observe whether or not

media and governmental agendas do converge, and in the process determine the degree to which each shifts to match the other.

Data from these same media and governmental sources can also be applied to a subjective determination of whether or not a consensus concerning a particular agenda item was present (or developed) within the government itself in each of the three cases. This analysis, when tied to public opinion data gathered during the period of each "threat," in turn permits the development of some tentative conclusions about the relationships which exist in the process of setting agendas and building consensus within the government, the mass media, and the public at large.

What emerges from the studies which follow is a clear perception that, while the agenda-setting function is shared by several actors, the initiative in determining "at what point we Americans shall expect the approach of danger" and the means by which we shall "fortify against it" lies with the government. The evidence does suggest that it is possible to build a public consensus concerning the "approach of danger" without the direct involvement of the President, through the use of Congressional hearings and debates to place the issue of an emerging threat on the media and public agendas. However, using such a consensus

to construct a working coalition in support of a particular program or policy to "fortify against" that threat appears to require the active participation of the executive branch. It is the success of just such participation by the Truman administration in the campaign to secure support for the policies of NSC-68 which makes that case as excellent bench mark against which to compare the less successful attempts to move the country to fortify against the threats associated with the missile gap and the window of vulnerability. Taken together, these three cases provide compelling evidence that, without a concerted effort by the President to "sell" his defense program in such a manner that competing Congressional and public demands upon the Government agenda are resolved, it is unlikely that a threat short of armed attack will prove sufficient to sustain a policy which will indeed move the nation to "fortify against the approach of danger."

### Notes for Chapter 1

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1. Thomas Jefferson, letter to Richard Henry Lee, 1825, in Grimes, Alan Pendleton. American Political Thought (Revised edition); Holt Reinhart and Winston, New York; 1960: pp. 88-89.
  2. Richard A. Melanson, in Melanson and Kenneth W. Thompson, eds., Foreign Policy and Domestic Consensus; University Press of America, Lanham, Maryland; 1985: p. 1.
  3. The Committee on the Present Danger, "Common Sense and the Present Danger," in Charles Tyroler II, ed. Alerting America; Pergamon-Brassey's, McLean, Virginia; 1984: p. 5.
  4. NSC-68, in Foreign Relations of the United States (hereafter FRUS), 1950, Vol. I; U.S. Government Printing Office (hereafter USGPO); Washington D.C.; 1977: p. 254.
  5. de Tocqueville, Alexis. Democracy in America, (1954 Vintage Press edition); Vintage Press, New York; 1954: Vol. I, pp. 243-244.
  6. Halle, Louis J. "Foreign Policy & the Democratic Process: The American Experience," in Halle and Kenneth W. Thompson, eds. Foreign Policy and the Democratic Process: The Geneva Papers; University Press of America, Washington D.C.; 1978: p. 9.
  7. de Tocqueville; op. cit.: p. 243.
  8. New York Times, (hereafter NYT); 10 April 1977: p. 16. Emphasis in original.
  9. Lincoln, Abraham. Speech to the Young Mens' Lyceum, Springfield, Illinois, 27 January 1837; Quoted in James Reston, "The Present Danger," NYT 17 Nov. 1978: P. 29.
  10. I am particularly indebted to Robert H. Johnson's article "Periods of Peril" in the spring 1983 edition of

Foreign Affairs for the concept of tying these three cases together in this manner.

11. Often the information provided was classified. While this public use of classified material forms a crucial link in this study, it is not its focal point. To adequately address the issue of secrecy in a free society requires another project of a length at least equal to this one.

12. Ibid.

13. Gruber, Doris. Mass Media and American Politics; Congressional Quarterly Press, Washington D.C.; 1980: p. 254.

14. Grossman, Michael B., and Martha Joynt Kumar. Portraying the President: The White House and the News Media; Johns Hopkins Press, Baltimore; 1981: p. 7.

15. Grossman and Kumar, p. 23; Paletz, David L., and Robert M. Entman. Media - Power - Politics; The Free Press, New York; 1981: p. 55.

16. Grossman and Kumar, p. 28.

17. Schwartz, Urs. "The Impact of the News Media on the Conduct of Foreign Policy," in Halle and Thompson, eds., op. cit.: p. 49.

18. Theodore H. White, The Making of the President 1972 (New York: Bantam, 1973), p. 327.

19. Doris Gruber, Mass Media and American Politics (Washington D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press, 1980), p. 59.

20. Thomas Jefferson, 1787, quoted in Reston, James. The Artillery of the Press: Its Influence on American Foreign Policy; Harper and Row, New York; 1966: frontispiece.

21. Cohen, Bernard. The Press and Foreign Policy; Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J.; 1963: pp. 22-25.

22. Gruber, op. cit.: pp. 132-134.

23. Paletz and Entman, op. cit.; "Part Two: The Media Manipulators": pp. 29-124.

24. Cohen, op. cit.: p. 5.

25. From Ibid.

26. George Gallup, writing in the forward to Levering, Ralph B. The Public and American Foreign Policy, 1918-1978; William Morrow & Co., N.Y.; 1978: p. 9.
27. Truman, Harry S. Public Papers of the President, 1949 (hereafter "Public Papers;" date): pp. 408-409.
28. Carter, Jimmy. Public Papers; 1977: pp. 954-962.
29. Nathan, James A., and James K. and Oliver. United States Foreign Policy and World Order; Little Brown & Co., Boston; 1983: p. 249.
30. Graber; op. cit.: p. 244.
31. Ibid.
32. Levering, op. cit.: p. 11.
33. For a thorough analysis of this distinction and the effects of polling technology on the ability to read "mass opinion," see Sabato, Larry. The Rise of Political Consultants; Basic Books, New York; 1981: pp. 319-321.
34. Schwartz. op. cit.: p. 51.
35. Cohen. op. cit.: p. 13.
36. Jordan, Hamilton. Crisis: The Last Year of the Carter Presidency; G.P. Putnam's Sons, New York; 1982: pp. 340-341, 379.
37. Thomas Jefferson, Second Inaugural Address. Quoted in Reston, op. cit.: p. vii.
38. Reston: p. 3.
39. See for example Cohen, pp. 28-30; Graber, pp. 80-82; Paletz and Entman, pp. 56-63; and Levering, pp. 11-12.
40. Reston; op. cit.: p. 50.
41. In Levering, op. cit.: p. 9.
42. Graber; op. cit.: p. 254.
43. Cohen; op. cit.: p. 29.
44. Ibid. p. 16.

45. A flow chart model of the relationship described here may be found in Appendix I.

46. This should not obscure the fact that there are many documented cases in which governmental leaders obtained their initial information from media stories. To a degree, this may be a function of where you are in the governmental "chain of command."

47. Graber: pp. 5-15.

48. Cohen: p. 164.

49. Paletz and Entman: p. 232.

50. Graber: p. 194.

51. See Jimmy Carter, Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President (New York: Bantam, 1982): p. 57; and Zbigniew Brzezinski, Power and Principle (New York: Farar-Straus-Giroux, 1983): p. 65.

52. Graber; op. cit.: pp. 63-64.

## Section II

### The Selling of NSC-68:

#### The Public Case for the Militarization of Containment

"The purpose of NSC-68 was to so bludgeon the mass mind of 'top government' that not only could the President make a decision but that the decision could be carried out."

Dean Acheson

### 2. Strong Economy, Strong Defense:

#### The Emergence of Conflicting Agendas

On the 31st of January, 1950, President Harry S. Truman called upon the Departments of State and Defense to "undertake a re-examination of our objectives in peace and war, and of the effects of these objectives on our strategic plans, in light of the probable fission bomb capability...of the Soviet Union."<sup>1</sup> Over the next two and one half months, a small group of men who constituted what was known as the "State-Defense Policy Review Group" labored in response to the President's directive. Their efforts resulted in a document which was described by Secretary of State Dean Acheson as "one of the most important documents in American history."<sup>2</sup> The document was NSC-68.

The document itself, consisting of some 66 pages, was classified "Top Secret." But it was never intended that its contents should be withheld from public knowledge. NSC-68 was, as John Lewis Gaddis put it, "as much a work of advocacy as of analysis."<sup>3</sup> It was, in many respects, a call to arms for the American people, asking their support in what has been labeled "the militarization of containment."<sup>4</sup> The perception that such a public call was necessary is made explicit in the text of NSC-68 itself, in language which might well have been taken directly from a treatise on democracy written during the founding of our country:

The full power which resides within the American people will be evoked only through the traditional democratic process: this process requires, firstly, that sufficient information regarding the basic political, economic, and military elements of the present situation be made publicly available so that an intelligent popular opinion may be formed. Having achieved a comprehension of the issues now confronting the Republic, it will then be possible for the American people and the American Government to arrive at a consensus. Out of this common view will develop a determination of the national will and a solid, resolute expression of that will. The initiative in this process lies with the government.<sup>5</sup>

It is clear from this passage that the drafters of NSC-68 were directly concerned with the linkage between policy and opinion in a democratic society. Several key elements of their views on this linkage stand out in the language they chose. It is evident that they believed it would be

necessary to build a consensus within both the public and governmental circles as a foundation for implementing the policies they were advocating. They emphasize the Jeffersonian concept of ties between the democratic process and the need for an informed public, or, as they put it, the formation of "an intelligent popular opinion." But the crucial portion of this statement, and the one which lay behind the use of NSC-68 as "a work of advocacy," is to be found in the last sentence. The assumption that "the initiative in this process lies with the government" provides the foundation upon which the entire NSC-68 process was based, both as an effort to get the government to take the initiative in formulating a military containment policy toward the Soviet Union, and subsequently to provide the tools necessary to forge the desired consensus once the initiative was taken.

It is the manner in which the government sought to exercise this "initiative" in developing a "consensus" on the "determination of the national will" which forms the central focus of this study. The drafting of NSC-68 and the means by which its findings were used to build support for the remobilization of American military potential in the early 1950s represent a classic example of the process by which the government can exercise leadership of public opinion through the use of the mass media and opinion

elites within the population itself. The success of this effort in contributing to the emergence of what is frequently described as the "cold war consensus" behind U.S. foreign policy for the remainder of the decade makes it a fitting starting point for our broader consideration of the process by which the government, the media, and the public are engaged in the process of "moving democracy to action." A word of caution is also in order, however, for a careful examination of the difficulties in gaining and maintaining support for the programs called for in NSC-68 serves equally well to illustrate the fragile nature of the consensus which was supposed to have dominated American policy in the 1950s.

As the presidential directive formally initiating the process of drafting NSC-68 indicated, the proximate cause of this policy review was the explosion of the first Soviet atomic bomb in the latter half of 1949.<sup>6</sup> On September 23, 1949, President Truman, noting that he was prompted by the belief that "the American people...are entitled to be informed," announced to the media that "we have evidence that within recent weeks an atomic explosion occurred in the USSR."<sup>7</sup> The thrust of his announcement was that the explosion had not taken the government by surprise, and that there was no immediate cause for alarm. "The eventual development of this new force by other nations was to be

expected," he stated. "This probability has always been taken into account by us."<sup>8</sup>

This same theme was echoed by spokesmen throughout the administration. Secretary of State Acheson, in a statement released the same day, reiterated the President's comments, emphasizing that virtually every public statement by the administration on atomic weapons had "clearly pointed out that this situation would develop," and stressing that "this event makes no change in our policy."<sup>9</sup> Such statements were dutifully reported by the news media in the following days.

In fact, of over a dozen articles on the front pages of the New York Times and the Washington Post which dealt with the explosion the day after the Presidential announcement, only one story noted that the real significance was not the fact that the Soviets had developed a bomb, but the timing of that development. As the headlines over a by-lined column by William Laurence noted, the "Soviet Achievement [was] Ahead of Predictions by 3 Years!"<sup>10</sup> "It had been customary," he reported, "to refer to 1952 as possibly the year when Russia would reach the stage we were at in the summer of 1945." This assessment was generally confirmed in subsequent testimony by Secretary of State Acheson before an executive session of the Senate Committee on Foreign

Relations, where he acknowledged that "our intelligence led us to believe that the Russians were due to make the first atomic explosion about 3 years after they actually did it," and that even the estimate of an "earliest possibility" for the explosion had suggested a Soviet test no sooner than June of 1950.<sup>11</sup> This admission, however, made behind the closed doors of a Senate committee executive session in January of 1950, clearly was not the public position of the administration in late 1949. The typical account of the administration's reaction to the Soviet explosion was echoed in a New York Times article on the 24th of September:

Privately as well as publicly, high civilian and military officials were calm and reassuring. In no quarter was there any hint of dismay.... General Omar Bradley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, expressed the official tone and demeanor in this statement: "The calmer the American people take this the better. We have anticipated it for four years, and it calls for no change in our basic defense plan."<sup>12</sup>

Despite General Bradley's call for calm, Laurence was alarmed by the implications of this new situation. As he saw it, the speed with which the Soviet Union had acquired the atomic bomb carried with it an ominous threat to the security of the United States in the very near future. According to Laurence's article:

It would be dangerous to assume that they are four years behind us and that it would take them that long to catch up with us. It would be much

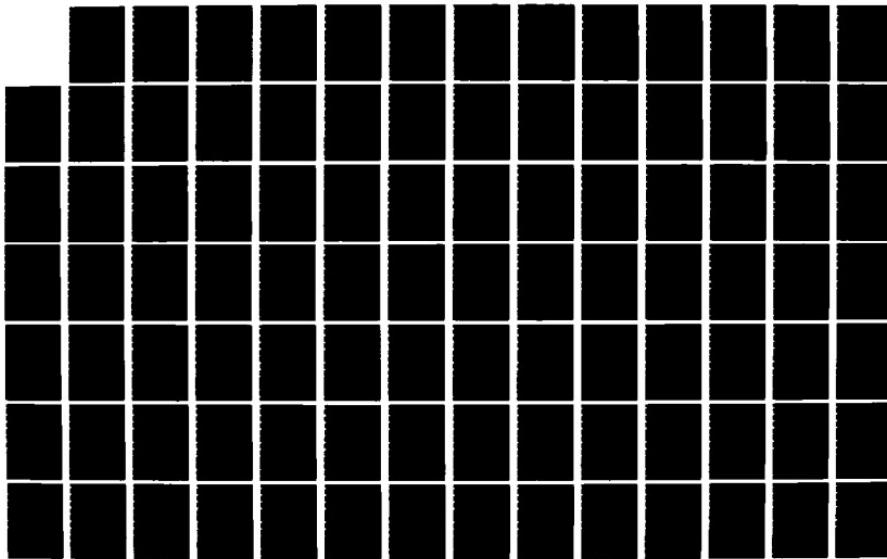
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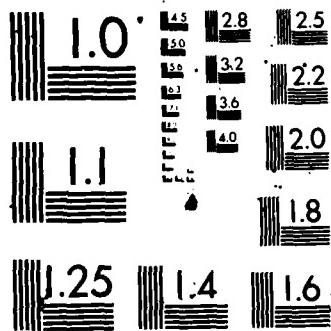
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MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART  
NATIONAL BUREAU OF STANDARDS-1963-A

more reasonable to assume that they have geared their plants to produce at a rate of one bomb a week, so that they will have a stockpile of at least 50 bombs a year from now, enough to destroy 50 of our cities with 40,000,000 of our population.<sup>13</sup>

It was precisely this sort of interpretation that the administration wished to avoid putting on the Soviet explosion, because to do so placed an item on the public agenda that was in direct competition with the basic governmental agenda in 1949. In particular, the Truman administration was publicly committed to the concept of a balanced budget, and an austere defense budget was a central element in its efforts. The philosophy behind Truman's immediate post-War defense posture was plainly stated in the "Report of the Committee on the National Security Organization," (the Eberstadt Committee) which in January 1949 had called upon the armed services to recognize "the fact that the strength of the Nation's economy is directly related to the Nation's defense strength." According to the Eberstadt Committee, the existing military budget (projected at the time to be between \$15 and \$16 billion for FY 1950) was "already imposing strains on the civilian economy and on the underlying human, material, and financial resources on which effective military strength depend."<sup>14</sup>

The Eberstadt Committee report was echoing a view the

President had articulated several months earlier during the 1948 Presidential election campaign. At a White House news conference on 16 October 1948, President Truman had told reporters that he hoped circumstances would soon allow the United States to reduce its military budget to a level of between \$5 and \$7 billion annually. "The country," he observed, "could not go on spending \$14,000,000,000 to \$15,000,000,000 a year for defense."<sup>15</sup> News and editorial columns published as the President began his new term in office were generally supportive of this viewpoint, as illustrated by Hanson Baldwin's report in the New York Times on 16 January 1949, which concluded that the proposed level of expenditures for defense in FY 1950, "if long continued might be fatal to the national economy."<sup>16</sup>

Within the administration, there is evidence that pressure to conform to this line was strong. As the guidelines for the FY 1950 defense budget were being drawn up in 1948, the President set a \$15 billion ceiling, and ordered "every member of the administration to support it fully, both in public and in private."<sup>17</sup> The President's order seems to have been equally binding on new members of the administration in 1949. In March, when Louis Johnson succeeded James Forrestal as Secretary of Defense, he was seen originally as a proponent of a strong defense establishment, but by mid-summer of 1949 his advocacy of a

far-reaching economy program for the military was so strong that in many quarters the issue of defense economy was identified with him rather than with the administration itself.<sup>18</sup>

Throughout 1949, the administration hammered home the theme that economic constraints made it imperative to keep defense spending at a manageable level. These efforts were particularly evident as the administration attempted to shepherd its FY 1950 defense spending bill through the Congress. In February, General Bradley urged that the Congress adopt economy measures in dealing with defense issues in order to avoid a national economic "bust."<sup>19</sup> In April, the President felt compelled to publicly reject a Congressional effort to add \$1.59 billion to the defense budget proposed by the administration.<sup>20</sup> While the House initially ignored the President's wishes, by July the administration was applauding proposals in the Senate to cut \$1.1 billion from the House version of the defense spending bill.<sup>21</sup> The President eventually signed a bill which authorized \$15.585 billion for defense on 30 October 1949, slightly over a month after the announcement of the Soviet atomic bomb explosion.<sup>22</sup>

The administration's military economy drive had already carried over into planning for the FY 1951 defense budget

by this time. In response to Presidential pressure to avoid either higher taxes or budget deficits, the initial drafts of the administration's fiscal year 1951 budget circulating in the summer of 1949 had placed a \$13.5 billion ceiling on defense spending.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, the administration was already making plans for an even smaller defense budget in following years, and the Soviet atomic test at first did not appear to cause a serious reconsideration of these plans. As General Bradley explained in testimony before the House Armed Services Committee in October of 1949, again over a month after the announcement of the Soviet atomic explosion: "We realize that our nation's economy, under existing conditions, can afford only a limited amount for defense, and that we must look forward to diminishing appropriations for the armed services."<sup>24</sup> As if to emphasize this point, in December 1949 Defense Secretary Johnson announced to the press that he believed that the administration's economy efforts could pare defense spending for the coming fiscal year down to \$13 billion.<sup>25</sup>

There was clearly no room in the agenda being pushed by the administration for a massive increase in defense spending to compensate for the loss of the American atomic monopoly. In fact, as late as spring of 1950, as NSC-68 was nearing completion, the President was still publicly

defending a reduced defense budget. In an early March press conference, he responded to criticism that "economies in the Defense Department have weakened our defenses dangerously" by asserting: "I don't think there is a word of truth in it.... I think you will find that the national defense situation is in better shape than it has ever been in times when we were not at war."<sup>26</sup>

That such criticisms were being raised at Presidential press conferences, however, clearly points to the emergence of a marked difference between the administration's public agenda and the agenda being put forward by representatives of the mass media at this time.<sup>27</sup> In some respects, by the spring of 1950, the media agenda might be described as leading the administration's public stance. On May 22, for example, the Washington Post ran an editorial calling for the creation of a "bipartisan commission on national security" to investigate, among other things, whether or not Louis Johnson's defense economies were having a damaging impact on the nation's military preparedness.<sup>28</sup> As had occurred in March, this item from the agenda of the press was raised at a Presidential news conference, requiring President Truman to at least address the proposal, if only to dismiss it.<sup>29</sup>

This shift in the media agenda, partially foretold by the

Laurence article in the New York Times in September 1949, had begun gathering momentum within a few weeks of the announcement of the Soviet explosion. On the 3rd of October, an editorial in Life magazine called upon the government to "recognize that Soviet possession of the bomb justifies a completely new approach to security."<sup>30</sup> A week later, to emphasize the point, Life ran an article entitled "Can Russia Deliver the Bomb?" which asserted that it was already feasible for the Soviets to attack the United States with nuclear weapons by sneaking them into American ports aboard merchant ships.<sup>31</sup> To illustrate their article, the editors ran a 1920 photograph of a terrorist bomb attack on Wall Street which they attributed to "Reds," despite the fact that no link between the 1920 explosion and Communists was ever demonstrated.<sup>32</sup>

Statements by Soviet leaders appearing in the Western press after the announcement of their acquisition of atomic weapons did nothing to dampen this rising sense of apprehension. On October 22, 1949, the New York Times reported that a Moscow radio broadcast had boasted that Russia's new atomic power would "force American military planners to recognize the impossibility...of aggression against the USSR."<sup>33</sup> Three weeks later, in a speech ostensibly designed to reassure the world that the Soviet Union was planning to use atomic power "for peaceful work,"

the Russian Ambassador to the United Nations "warned the United States not to rely on hopes that it would retain its lead over the Soviet Union in the number of atomic bombs [each country possessed]."<sup>34</sup> Such a statement was clearly more in line with the interpretation William Laurence had placed on the news of the Soviet atomic test than that which the administration was attempting to advance at this time. Even more ominously, a statement issued in Moscow on the same day as the United Nations speech appeared to threaten the United States with direct nuclear retaliation should hostilities occur between the two countries. According to the account of the statement which appeared in the New York Times, "the Russians today suggested that the next World War, if it came, might be fought on the North American continent." The Times quoted the Soviets as stating that "Americans are beginning to realize...that if the warmongers organize a new slaughter of peoples, the grief of mothers, of wives, of sisters and children will visit the American Continent."<sup>35</sup>

Not surprisingly, in addition to focusing press attention on the potential increase in the threat to American security, such statements also served to generate concern in Congress over the adequacy of U.S. defense policy in the wake of the Soviet atomic test. In the House, Armed Services Committee chairman Carl Vinson (D-Ga.), a

long-time advocate of increased defense spending for strategic air power, announced that his committee would open an investigation which would "reach into this country's highest defense policies and strategic plans."<sup>36</sup> In the face of what he saw as the "universal knowledge" that "Russia is building up the largest air force in the world" for the purpose of delivering its new-found atomic might, Representative Vinson expressed concern that the administration's economy programs (and specifically those associated with Secretary of Defense Johnson) were resulting in "reductions in the effectiveness of the armed forces."<sup>37</sup> Begun less than three weeks after the announcement of the Soviet atomic test, the House Armed Services Committee investigations carried over into the spring of 1950, when Vinson reported his conclusion that:

[I]n my judgement, Mr. Johnson's economy scalpel has not only carved away some service fat, but has cut - deeply in some areas - into sinew and muscle of the armed services.... I regret deeply that in his zeal for economy, Secretary Johnson has weakened <sup>38</sup> the national security in very important respects.

Ironically, the Soviet atomic test also provided ammunition for those in the Congress who opposed the administration's defense policies because they believed those policies were too costly. Senator Robert A. Taft (R-Ohio), one of the leading Republican opponents of the Truman administration, saw the development of the Soviet

atomic bomb as making it "silly to spend money building up land armies in Europe when Russia might force them to surrender without a fight by threatening to drop atomic bombs on cities."<sup>39</sup> He would subsequently carry this argument through even the outbreak of the Korean War while leading Congressional opposition to virtually all of the programs called for by NSC-68. Clearly, by the spring of 1950, the Congress was not unified in its reaction to the loss of the American nuclear monopoly. But at the same time, it was clear that concern over the course of American defense policy had been placed firmly on the agendas of both the mass media and the Congress, despite whatever wishes the Truman administration might have had in regard to this issue.

That the media and Congressional agendas were having an effect on policy considerations is evident from the concern expressed by those within the administration during this period. By February of 1950, for example, George Kennan felt compelled to write a memo to Dean Acheson outlining his views "in light of the current demand in the Congress and the press that we re-evaluate our entire policy."<sup>40</sup> Kennan was concerned that the media were exaggerating the threat. "The overall situation," he asserted, "while serious, is neither unexpected nor necessarily catastrophic." What was serious, he believed, was the

apparent inability of the government to present its own agenda in a manner which would win public acceptance. There was a need "to improve our general impact on press and Congress and public." Unless this need was met, he saw a "serious and urgent danger that our present policy toward the Soviet Union will founder on the lack of popular support." To prevent such an outcome, he observed that:

I think it quite essential that we find a new and much more effective approach to the problem of making our policies understood within this Government and among our own people.... Up to this time, it seems to me, we have been quite unsuccessful in this. You still have the most distinguished and influential of our columnists and diplomatic observers making statements which reflect an almost incredible ignorance of the basic elements of our foreign policy, to say nothing <sup>41</sup> of the state of mind of Congressional circles.

Kennan was not the only member of the State Department to express his concern about the impact of public opinion on the administration's policies during this period. Less than one week after the March 2 press conference during which President Truman defended the low levels of defense spending, Edward Barrett, Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs, circulated a memorandum in which he observed that "talks with a number of Congressmen in the last few days, who have told me about their mail, underscores my belief that there is increasing public pressure, which could become dangerous, for some sort of

bold action."<sup>42</sup>

Such calls for bold action, it should be noted, were not falling on totally deaf ears within the administration. While George Kennan was concerned that the Soviet threat was being exaggerated, Dean Acheson was worried that it was not being stated forcefully enough. The House Appropriations Committee, after all, was in the process of voting to cut defense expenditures by some \$200,000,000 in the spring of 1950.<sup>43</sup> The Secretary of State had long been a supporter of a more forceful defense posture toward the Soviet Union, and had in fact been one of the prime movers behind efforts to get the President to authorize a study such as NSC-68.<sup>44</sup> The same could also be said of Paul Nitze, who had succeeded Kennan as the director of the State Department Policy Planning Staff in 1949. He brought with him to the job a strong belief that unless the country could find some way to enhance its own and its allies' military capabilities, there was a serious danger that the United States would find itself "losing the peace."<sup>45</sup> In the spring of 1950, he found himself in charge of drafting the Department's input for the statement which was to become NSC-68.<sup>46</sup> Now, as the document neared completion, both he and the Secretary of State were fully aware of its potential as a public relations tool which could help move the country in the direction they believed it needed to

go.

Acheson, in particular, was quite clear in his views that a "public relations tool" was precisely what was called for in this case. In January, during testimony before an executive session of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, he had been reminded of his need to educate the public on the nature of the Soviet threat by Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr. (R-Mass), who had advised him that "you have a particularly heavy responsibility on this subject because public opinion is in the dark, and public opinion would support...or presumably support, whatever you in your solemn responsibility decide to tell them."<sup>47</sup> As Acheson now saw that "solemn responsibility," he believed that it required him to state the nature of the threat in stark and dramatic terms. As he later explained:

The task of a public officer seeking to explain and gain support for a major policy is not that of the writer of a doctoral thesis. Qualification must give way to simplicity of statement, nicety and nuance to bluntness, almost brutality, in carrying home a point.<sup>48</sup>

The Secretary of State was aware that it was not just to the public that he would have to sell the arguments of NSC-68. The administration and the Congress would have to be sold as well, during a period of what Acheson described as "partisan in-fighting as bloody as any in our history."<sup>49</sup> The course of action required to carry through

the recommendations of the study would represent a total reversal of the policies that had been advocated by the administration through the early part of 1950. Rather than fiscal restraint and a tight defense budget, NSC-68 would require a massive increase in defense spending supported by higher tax rates and a Keynesian view of economic management.<sup>50</sup> In the words of the document itself:

A program for rapidly building up strength and improving political and economic conditions will place heavy demands on our courage and intelligence; it will be costly; it will be dangerous. But half measures will be more costly and more dangerous, for they will be inadequate to prevent and may actually invite war. Budgetary considerations will need to be subordinated to the stark fact that our very independence as a nation may be at stake.<sup>51</sup>

The document goes on to urge "increases in expenditures for military purposes....in military assistance programs....[and] in economic assistance programs." These increases are to be supported by "reduction of Federal expenditures for purposes other than defense and foreign assistance, if necessary by the deferment of certain desirable programs," and through "increased taxes."<sup>52</sup> NSC-68 itself did not contain any specific cost estimates, but as Acheson notes, "that did not mean we had not discussed them." The opinion of the State-Defense Policy Review Group was that meeting the requirements imposed by the NSC-68 recommendations would involve "a military budget

of the magnitude of about fifty billion dollars."<sup>53</sup>

While the public and media agendas during the early months of 1950 were clearly moving in the direction of a stronger military response to a growing Soviet threat, there is little evidence to suggest that public opinion was prepared for a shift of anything like the magnitude contemplated in NSC-68. A Gallup Poll published in late March 1950 found that while 23% of those polled believed the government was spending too little on defense, 44% felt that the level of defense spending was "about right" and 15% believed that too much was already being spent on the military.<sup>54</sup> These findings were in line with earlier polls which had indicated that while a small majority of the population might support an increase in the size of the armed forces, less than 50% would be willing to pay for such an increase through higher taxes.<sup>55</sup>

Just prior to the release of the March 1950 Gallup Poll, the State Department Office of Public Affairs issued its own "Confidential" report on "American Public Attitudes toward Possible Adoption of Stronger U.S. Foreign Policy Measures."<sup>56</sup> This report indicated just how far public opinion would have to be moved to win acceptance for a program of the magnitude called for by NSC-68. Based on "extensive study of public comment in press and radio, of

the positions taken by major national organizations, and of the findings of public opinion surveys," the report concluded that although "the overwhelming majority of Americans believe that the United States must continue its efforts to stop Communist expansion," resistance could be expected to any proposals requiring "personal sacrifice....new burdens....higher taxes and a more unbalanced budget."<sup>57</sup> Of course, these were exactly the sort of sacrifices being called for in NSC-68.

Moreover, in the face of the President's previous public commitment to hold down defense spending and the evidence that the public was not prepared for a major shift in budgetary priorities, Acheson was aware that it would prove difficult to get the administration itself committed to full endorsement of NSC-68. His fears in this regard seem more than borne out by the fact that as late as May 4th, after he had already seen and endorsed the basic concepts of NSC-68, President Truman went on record as stating that "we are not alarmed in any sense of the word.... The defense budget next year will be smaller than it is this year."<sup>58</sup> At approximately the same time, Secretary of Defense Louis Johnson was reported to be conducting "preliminary soundings" on a possible \$10 billion ceiling on defense spending for the 1952 fiscal year!<sup>59</sup> Little wonder then that Dean Acheson believed that the primary

need for NSC-68 was to "so bludgeon the mass mind of 'top government' that not only could the President make a decision, but that the decision could be carried out!"<sup>60</sup>

## Notes for Chapter 2

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1. Foreign Relations of the United States (hereafter FRUS), 1950: Vol. I: p. 142.
  2. Nathan, James A., and James K. Oliver. United States Foreign Policy and World Order, 2nd Edition; Little, Brown and Company, Boston; 1981: p. 116, note 72.
  3. Gaddis, John Lewis. Strategies of Containment; Oxford University Press, New York and Oxford; 1982: p. 106.
  4. Sanders, Jerry W. Peddlers of Crisis; South End Press, Boston; 1983: p. 23.
  5. NSC-68, in FRUS; 1950, Vol. I: p. 254.
  6. Johnson, Robert H. "Periods of Peril: The Window of Vulnerability and Other Myths." Foreign Affairs, Vol. 61, No. 4 (Spring 1983): p. 956. Most studies also note the "loss" of mainland China. See the account by Gaddis in Strategies of Containment, p. 90.
  7. Truman, Harry S. Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, 1949. (Hereafter, "Truman, Public Papers, 19xx") Washington D.C.; U.S. Government Printing Office (1965): p. 485.
  8. Ibid.
  9. Department of State Bulletin, 3 Oct 1949; Washington; U.S. Government Printing Office (hereafter USGPO): p. 487.
  10. The New York Times, (Hereafter NYT), 24 Sept., 1949: p. 1A.
  11. U.S. Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations; Reviews of the World Situation: 1949-1950; Hearings held in Executive Session, 81st Congress, 1st and 2nd Sessions; "Statement of Hon. Dean Acheson, Secretary of State, 10 January 1950"; USGPO, Washington; 1974: pp. 123-124.

12. NYT, 24 September, 1949: p. 2A.
13. Ibid.: p. 1A.
14. National Security Organization; Report Prepared for the Commission on Organization of the Executive Branch by the Committee on the National Security Organization; USGPO, Washington D.C.; 1949: pp. 3, 45.
15. NYT, 17 October 1948.
16. NYT, 16 Jan 1949: p. 13.
17. Truman, to the Joint Chiefs and Service Secretaries, 13 May 1948, quoted in Warner R. Schilling, "The Politics of National Defense: Fiscal 1950;" in Schilling, Hammond, and Snyder, Strategy, Politics, and Defense Budgets; Columbia University Press, New York; 1962: p. 155.
18. NYT, 5 March 1949: p. 6; and Paul Y. Hammond, "NSC-68: Prologue to Containment," in Schilling, Hammond, and Snyder, op. cit.: p. 292.
19. NYT, 5 February 1949: p. 6.
20. NYT, 1 April 1949: p. 1.
21. NYT, 16 July 1949: p. 1.
22. NYT, 30 October 1949: p. 1.
23. Acheson, Dean. Present at the Creation: My Years in the State Department. Signet Press, New York; 1969: p. 452.
24. Quoted in Huntington, Samuel P. The Common Defense. Columbia University Press, New York; 1961: pp. 49-50.
25. NYT, 8 December 1949: p. 1.
26. Truman. News Conference of 2 March 1950. Public Papers, 1950: p. 183.
27. I use the term "administration's public agenda" here because it is clear that by this time the private opinions of those working on NSC-68 were significantly different from those being articulated by the President.
28. "The Road Back to America," in The Washington Post; 22 May 1950.

29. Truman, "News Conference of 25 May;" Public Papers, 1950: p. 416.
30. Life; 3 Oct 1949: p. 22.
31. Ibid., 10 Oct 1949: p. 44. The article also mentioned the possibility of attack by Soviet "Bull" bombers (copies of our B-29) and by rockets fired from submarines off our coasts.
32. Aronson, James. The Press and the Cold War. Bobbs-Merrill Press, New York; 1970: p. 57.
33. NYT; 22 Oct 1949: p. 5.
34. NYT; 11 Nov 1949: p. 1.
35. NYT; 11 Nov 1949: p. 3.
36. NYT; 6 Oct 1949: p. 1.
37. Carl Vinson, speech to the House of Representatives, 4 April 1950, in The Congressional Record, 1950; Vol 96, Part 4: pp. 4681-83.
38. Ibid.: p. 4681.
39. NYT; 25 September 1949: p. 1.
40. Kennan, "Memorandum to the Secretary of State" in FRUS, 1950, Vol. I: pp. 160-167.
41. Ibid.: p. 166.
42. E. W. Barrett, "Memorandum by the Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs," 6 March 1950; in FRUS, 1950 Vol. I: p. 185.
43. Hammond, op. cit.: p. 332.
44. Acheson, op. cit.: pp. 451-457.
45. Nitze, Paul. "The Development of NSC-68," in International Security, Vol. 4, No. 4 (Spring 1980): pp. 170-172.
46. Hammond, op. cit.: pp. 287-289.
47. "Review of the World Situation," Friday, January 13, 1950; in U.S. Senate; Hearings Held in Executive Session before the Committee on Foreign Relations; 81st Congress,

- 1st and 2nd Sessions; op. cit.: p. 189.
48. Acheson, op. cit.: p. 489.
49. Acheson: p. 451.
50. Gaddis: pp. 93-94.
51. NSC-68, in FRUS 1950, Vol. I: p. 285.
52. Ibid.
53. Acheson: p. 491.
54. George Gallup, "Polls published 24 March 1950," The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion 1935-1971; Random House, New York; 1972: Vol. 2, pp. 897-898.
55. Ibid., "Polls from 21 February 1949;" p. 791. The data show 56% supporting a larger army, but only 44% willing to pay higher taxes for it.
56. "Memorandum by the Director of the Office of Public Affairs (Francis H. Russell)," 6 March 1950; FRUS 1950, Vol. I: p. 185.
57. Ibid.: pp. 186-187.
58. Truman, Public Papers, 1950: p. 286. Emphasis added.
59. Hammond, op. cit.: p. 331.
60. Acheson, op. cit.: p. 488.

### 3. Packaging the Program

Given the views of those most responsible for the drafting of the document on the need for a "bludgeon," it should not be surprising that John Lewis Gaddis found that "one of the things most striking about NSC-68 was its rhetorical tone." As Gaddis observed, "portions of it sounded as though they had been intended for the floor of Congress, or some other conspicuous public platform."<sup>1</sup> In fact, they had been, despite the fact that the overall document remained classified until 1975. One of the things which the drafters of NSC-68 were seeking to develop in conjunction with their study, according to Paul Nitze, was "a gospel which lends itself to preaching."<sup>2</sup>

What was most needed in a statement of policy such as NSC-68, in the words of Secretary of State Acheson, was "communicable wisdom."<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, as George Kennan had clearly reflected in his memo of 17 February 1950, the record of the Department of State in generating "communicable wisdom" up to that point was not particularly outstanding. In the drafting of NSC-68, therefore, Acheson and the members of the State-Defense Policy Review Group spent considerable time attempting to assess how their

recommendations could be made understandable to the "mythical 'average American citizens'" who might spend at most an average of ten minutes a day concerning themselves with foreign affairs.<sup>4</sup> These were the people to whom NSC-68 addressed its appeal that "this Government and the people it represents must now take new and fateful decisions...[to] make ourselves strong, both in the ways in which we affirm our values in the conduct of our national life, and in the development of our military and economic strength."<sup>5</sup>

The task confronting the Policy Review Group was to convince this "average citizen" that the threat posed by the Soviet Union to "our national life" was serious enough to warrant an immediate and massive buildup in America's defensive capabilities. This threat had already been presented to the National Security Council in alarming terms on 1 February 1950. According to a study by the Joint Chiefs of Staff entitled "Need of Defense Measures Against Increasing Threat of Atomic Attack Against the Continental United States," the Soviet acquisition of atomic weapons "posed us with the possibility that the atomic bomb, which ended World War II, and which we now believe is being produced by the Soviet (sic), might in the future be used against us in a new type of Pearl Harbor attack of infinitely greater magnitude than that of 1941."<sup>6</sup>

Intelligence estimates prepared by the CIA during this period projected that the Soviet Union would develop a stockpile of 10-20 atomic weapons by mid-1950, with the numbers growing to around 100 sometime in 1953 and to 200 by mid-1954.<sup>7</sup>

Paul Nitze used these intelligence estimates in preparing a study for the first meeting of the Policy Review Group preparing to draft NSC-68 on 8 February 1950. In this study, Nitze argued that "recent Soviet moves reflect not only a mounting militancy, but suggest a boldness that is essentially new - and borders on recklessness...." Based on Soviet actions and statements since the testing of their first atomic weapon, his study concluded that "Moscow appears to be animated by a general sense of confidence," which, he asserted, was well founded. This situation was made even more ominous, in Nitze's eyes, by his conviction that "the USSR has shown a willingness to employ at any given moment any maneuver or weapon which holds promise of success."<sup>8</sup> As Nitze saw it, the Policy Review Group's reaction to these developments should be driven by four crucial assumptions about the resulting world situation: "(1) that the Russians' capabilities are now greater than the public believe, (2) the capabilities of Western Europe [to resist Soviet pressure] are very low, (3) our own efforts are inadequate, and (4) there is a relationship

between confidence and security."<sup>9</sup> "The thing to do," he concluded, "was to strengthen the moral fiber of the people." He went on to suggest to the group that, in proceeding with their analysis, "you should build toward that objective."<sup>10</sup>

This task was made difficult by the fact that the threat which this appeal was designed to meet was not an immediate one. According to the members of the Policy Review Group, the chief danger from the Soviet Union was believed to be some four years in the future. While their assessment held that "the Soviet Union actually possesses armed forces far in excess of those necessary to defend its national territory," they went on to conclude that "these armed forces are probably not yet considered by the Soviet Union to be sufficient to initiate a war which would involve the United States."<sup>11</sup> Taking their cue from the CIA estimates of potential Soviet acquisition rates for atomic weapons, they projected that "the date the Soviets possess an atomic stockpile of 200 bombs (1954) would be a critical date for the United States."<sup>12</sup> The analysis developed in NSC-68 concluded that "if the potential military capabilities of the United States and its allies were rapidly and effectively developed, sufficient forces could be produced probably to deter war" by this date.<sup>13</sup> However, the study went on, "under existing peacetime conditions, a period of

from two to three years is required to produce a material increase in military power."<sup>14</sup> Thus the challenge to American security envisioned in NSC-68, while not projected to peak until 1954, could only be successfully met if America began rearming herself immediately, and at considerable cost.

The crucial question confronting the Policy Review Group thus became how to persuade the administration, Congress, and the public to embark upon an expensive and long term program of rearmament designed primarily to meet a danger which would not be real until 1954. It seemed clear to them that they could not expect the country to incur the costs of such a program without first making that danger appear as obvious to the man in the street as it did to those having access to the most highly classified intelligence data. Their concern over the magnitude of the problem was expressed in NSC-68 itself:

A large measure of sacrifice and discipline will be demanded of the American people. They will be asked to give up some of the benefits which they have come to associate with their freedoms. Nothing could be more important than that they fully understand the reasons for this.<sup>15</sup>

The approach they chose to adopt was, in effect, to oversell the threat. Paul Nitze recognized this fact in a meeting of the group on 10 March 1950, when he admitted

that "in the paper as it now stands there is a tendency to over-estimate Russian strength and under-estimate Russian weakness."<sup>16</sup> Motivated by the "feeling that the United States was losing the peace," the Policy Review Group drafted a document that, according to Paul Hammond's analysis of the process, "provided a partial substitute within the Executive branch for the oversimplification of objectives in war."<sup>17</sup> As Dean Acheson subsequently put it, the urgency of the situation, as seen by those involved in drafting NSC-68, made it necessary to "make our points clearer than truth."<sup>18</sup>

The language of NSC-68 itself clearly reflected this decision. "The issues that face us are momentous," it proclaimed, "involving the fulfillment or destruction not only of this Republic but of civilization itself."<sup>19</sup> Asserting that "the idea of freedom is the most contagious idea in history," it warned that this idea was nevertheless in danger because "the Soviet Union...animated by a new fanatic faith, antithetical to our own...seeks to impose its absolute authority over the rest of the world."<sup>20</sup> Moreover, the Soviet Union was "developing the military capacity to support its design for world domination." Already it was seen to have the capability of overrunning Western Europe, launching air attacks against Britain, and attacking selected targets in the United States with atomic

weapons.<sup>21</sup> By 1954, if the Soviet buildup were met with "no more effective defense opposition than the United States and its allies have programmed," a surprise attack could "lay waste to the British Isles" and "devastate...vital centers of the United States and Canada."<sup>22</sup>

In response to such challenges, NSC-68 charged that "it is clear that a substantial and rapid buildup of strength in the free world is necessary to support a firm policy intended to check and roll back the Kremlin's drive for world domination." In particular, what was required was "a build-up of military strength by the United States and its allies to a point at which the combined strength will be superior...both initially and throughout a war, to the forces that can be brought to bear by the Soviet Union and its satellites."<sup>23</sup> The benefits of following these recommendations were described in equally dramatic terms. "If such a course of increasing our military power is adopted now," the document proclaimed, "the United States would have the capability of eliminating the disparity between its military strength and the exigencies of the situation we face; eventually of gaining the initiative in the 'cold' war and of materially delaying if not stopping the Soviet offensives in war itself."<sup>24</sup> Moreover, in addition to such military implications, it was necessary to pursue this course of action to avoid seeing our allies

"become increasingly reluctant to support a firm foreign policy on our part." A military build-up was thus seen as necessitated for its "psychological impact - the revival of confidence and hope in the future."<sup>25</sup>

Faced with the threat of Communist world domination, the "destruction...of civilization itself," and loss of hope in the future, the cost of the programs required to support the policy recommendations of NSC-68 would seem like a bargain. The crux of the matter, then, was to set the agenda in those terms. As the conclusion to NSC-68 succinctly put it:

The whole success of the proposed program hangs ultimately on recognition by this Government, the American people, and all free peoples, that the cold war is in fact a real war in which the survival of the free world is at stake. Essential prerequisites to success are consultations with Congressional leaders designed to make the program the subject of non-partisan legislative support, and a presentation to the public of a full explanation of the facts and implications <sup>26</sup> of the present international situation.

Preparation for this "presentation to the public" was underway well before the final draft of NSC-68 was completed. Throughout the month of March in 1950, the Policy Review Group held hearings with key citizens (who were currently outside of government circles) for the express purpose of getting advice on how the basic tenets of NSC-68 might best be "sold" to the American people.

These citizen consultants were drawn from a segment of the population that might accurately be described as "opinion elites." Most had held government positions at some point in their careers. Now their task was to review existing drafts of NSC-68 and make recommendations as to how its arguments might be presented in such a way as to have the maximum desired impact on the public.

One of the first of these consultants to advise the Policy Review Group was J. Robert Oppenheimer, who called for a marked reduction in government secrecy coupled with "an ambitious program to explain the facts of the current international situation to the public."<sup>27</sup> His call for a program to "explain the facts" to the public was taken up in greater detail by Chester Barnard, President of the Rockefeller Foundation, whose views on the problems facing the Group closely paralleled the earlier observations of George Kennan. "At the present time," he said, "those who do most of the talking do not know the facts."<sup>28</sup> He observed that "cohesion in our Democracy is basic to United States security, and that the government was going to need assistance in getting public support for the national effort which would be called for." This, he believed, would be "a difficult job for the government to handle alone."<sup>29</sup> He felt that the government should seek help from the civilian sector in selling its message to the public.

As the minutes of the meeting at which he spoke record:

Specifically, he advocated setting up a group of five or ten worthy citizens of good reputation and high integrity who have no connection with the government, who would have available to them all of the material on which the government based its conclusions, and who could then say to the people, "We are thoroughly advised and you can accept what we say."<sup>30</sup>

Mr. Barnard's conclusions were given a strong endorsement in an independent set of recommendations put forward by former Under Secretary of State Robert Lovett, who was soon to be back in government service as Deputy Secretary of Defense.<sup>31</sup> In a meeting of the Policy Review Group on the 16th of March, Mr. Lovett testified that "he agreed with the general conclusion that we must build up our strength, and he said that this requires, in the first instance, giving the facts to the public."<sup>32</sup> Toward this end, he noted that the NSC document itself contained "some portions which are excellent material for speeches," and suggested that the conclusions should be stated "simply, clearly, and in almost telegraphic style" in what he referred to as "Hemingway sentences."<sup>33</sup>

Even with a strongly worded document, however, Lovett felt that the administration was going to face "a terrible problem of public information and support." What was needed, he believed, was a "much vaster propaganda machine to tell our story at home and abroad."<sup>34</sup> As an initial step

in this direction, the minutes record that he made several specific suggestions, to include:

(1) that we get in what he called a "group of paraphrasers" who could turn what it is we have to say to the American people into understandable terms for the average man on the street. (2) that we parcel out our message to a number of the best speakers in the Government to be reiterated and reiterated and reiterated. (3) we should enlist the aid of schools, colleges, churches, and other groups.... (4) he suggested that we get a group of elder statesmen (very much like that suggested by Mr. Barnard) which would "audit and certify" our findings and thereby back up the Administration's statement of the facts.<sup>35</sup>

That considerations such as these were being solicited as part of the process of drafting NSC-68 is excellent testimony to the degree to which the document was intended to be "communicable." Even those who were not in full agreement with all of the conclusions of NSC-68, such as former State Department Counselor Charles E. Bohlen, found themselves impressed with the degree to which sections of the report "might be very good material for publications, speeches, or other media."<sup>36</sup> Moreover, beyond their impact on the wording of the document, it is striking to note that almost all of the tactics recommended by consultants such as Lovett and Barnard were eventually brought into play as the government moved to adopt the policies called for in NSC-68.

Not all of the recommendations for "selling" NSC-68 to

the public came from consultants outside of the government. Although his recommendations seem to have been made at a rather late stage in the development of the document (April 6, just one day before the final product was submitted to President Truman for his approval!), the observations of Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs Edward Barrett are worth serious consideration. Rather than confining himself to the short-term tactics of presenting the NSC-68 proposals to the American people, he was concerned with the long-term implications of the policies necessary to support those proposals when he wrote:

My most important point: the whole paper seems to me to point to a gigantic armament race, a huge buildup of conventional arms that quickly become obsolescent, a greatly expanded military establishment in being. I think that, however much we whip up sentiment, we are going to run into vast opposition among informed people to a huge arms race.... Moreover, even if we should sell the idea, I fear that the U.S. public would rapidly tire of such an effort. In the absence of a real and continuing crisis, a dictatorship can unquestionably out-last<sup>37</sup> a democracy in a conventional armament race.

Such reservations notwithstanding, Barrett observed that he considered the overall document "a magnificent job of analyzing the problem," and he believed in the need to educate the public about its contents. "If and when this whole project is approved by the President," he stated, "the public education campaign must obviously receive the

most careful study." He was concerned, however, lest the selling of the threat generate pressure for steps which the government might not be prepared to take. "We must be sure," he cautioned, "that the Government:"

...is in a position to come forward with positive steps to be taken just as soon as the atmosphere is right. It is imperative, for both domestic and overseas reasons, that there should not be too much of a time lag between the creation of a public awareness of the problem and the setting forth of a positive Government program to solve that problem.

In other words, we should have at least the broad proposals for action well in hand before the psychological "scare campaign" is started.<sup>38</sup>

Whether as a "psychological scare campaign" or a "bludgeon" for the "mass mind of the top government," NSC-68 was clearly intended to place the rearmament of the Western world at the top of the government and public agendas for action. On April 7, 1950, after two months of intensive effort devoted to drafting and revising the final text, the State-Defense Policy Review Group submitted it to President Truman for approval. In its final form, the document was a stark analysis of the growing Soviet threat and a call for action to meet it. It was not, however, a detailed program in itself: it contained no cost estimates, nor any specific plans or timetables for the rearmament for which it called.<sup>39</sup> The President, while impressed with the threat depicted, wanted more information before endorsing

what was, in effect, a request for a blank check for increased defense spending. On April 12th, he referred it to the National Security Council "for consideration, with the request that [the Council] provide me with further information on the implications of the Conclusions contained therein." "I am particularly anxious," he continued, "that the Council give me a clearer understanding of the programs which are envisaged by the Report, including estimates of the probable cost of such programs."<sup>40</sup>

The probable cost of such programs, as has already been indicated, was one of the critical stumbling blocks in the path of gaining full administration approval for NSC-68. While some accounts, including Dean Acheson's own, indicate that NSC-68 had become national policy by the end of April, the fact that the President was still publicly committed to further reductions in defense spending throughout much of May casts some doubt on how fully he was willing to support the Policy Review Group's proposals.<sup>41</sup> As late as May 25, the President was telling reporters that a firm ceiling had been placed on the defense budget for the coming year (although he declined to say what that ceiling was).<sup>42</sup> This view seemed to reflect quite clearly the position articulated by Budget Director Frank Pace, who, despite extensive briefings by Nitze on the background of NSC-68,

remained strongly committed to the concept that economic constraints absolutely precluded any major increase in defense spending.<sup>43</sup> Even supporters of the report within the White House, such as Special Counsel to the President Charles Murphy, urged caution in endorsing NSC-68's proposals until a clearer indication of the costs involved could be made available.<sup>44</sup> The White House does not appear to have been alone in its reservations on this matter, for as late as June 5th of 1950, Secretary of Defense Louis Johnson was still saying that he did not expect defense costs to be increased.<sup>45</sup>

While others in the administration may not have been sure about endorsing the recommendations of NSC-68 as national policy, there was no doubt in Dean Acheson's mind. Throughout the spring of 1950, he went about the country "preaching the premise of NSC-68," as he put it, in a series of public speeches and appearances before Congressional committees.<sup>46</sup> On the 22nd of April, 1950, using language which could have been taken directly from passages in NSC-68, the Secretary of State told the American Society of Newspaper Editors that "we are faced with a threat not only to our country but also to the civilization in which we live and to the whole physical environment in which that civilization can exist."<sup>47</sup> Warning that "the Soviet authorities would use, and gladly

use, any means at their command to weaken and to harm us," he concluded that if we were to "demonstrate our faith in freedom...it is essential that we, and those who think like us, should have the power to make safe the area in which we carry that faith into action. This means that we must look to our defenses."<sup>48</sup> He continued to draw on the language and concepts of NSC-68 for speeches over the next several months, including a dramatic mid-June address in Dallas on "Peace Through Strength: A Foreign Policy Objective," in which he presented a list of four possible foreign policy options which came directly from the conclusions of that supposedly "Top Secret" analysis.<sup>49</sup> Rejecting the "options" of isolation, appeasement, and preventive war, the Secretary of State urged a "policy of international cooperation...supplemented by a program for strengthening the free world."<sup>50</sup> Needless to say, this was the same option endorsed by NSC-68.

By early June, President Truman had also begun to talk in terms of "a program that will create the greatest possible national strength."<sup>51</sup> Still, he had not yet officially endorsed NSC-68 and its full range of policy recommendations. (Truman did not officially approve the document until September 30, 1950.) In fact, for slightly over two months following the referral of NSC-68 back to the National Security Council for further consideration, it

seemed evident that factions within the administration were simultaneously moving in two different directions in articulating the basis for national security policy. One line was toward the expanded defense program called for by Acheson and Nitze in NSC-68, which was, after all, under consideration by the Security Council at Presidential direction. The other line, associated most closely with Defense Secretary Louis Johnson, reflected a continuation of the administration's earlier efforts to hold down defense spending.<sup>52</sup> As a result, the overall impression left by the administration through most of the spring was that of a government unsure of its own course in national defense.

This confusion as to what was actually on the national agenda was reflected as well in the agenda being presented in the mass media throughout the same time period. A series of articles and editorials in U.S. News and World Report during May of 1950 will serve to illustrate the point. On May 5th, a full page editorial by David Lawrence urged the government to hold down defense spending, noting that Russia was "trying to bleed the U.S. to death in an arms race."<sup>53</sup> On the 19th, however, an article in the "Tomorrow" section observed that "Russia, to date, is gaining in the arms race," and called on the United States to "speed up." "A cold war cannot be fought without

danger," it noted, and continued by asserting that "danger can't well be faced without a strong defense... Defense, in turn, costs money, lots of it, much more, probably, than the U.S. is spending now."<sup>54</sup> The next week, the cover story asked the question: "Can Russia Defeat the U.S.?", and answered by stating that "Stalin's chances of winning an early war are slipping away," due to the stockpile of American atomic weapons.<sup>55</sup>

Whether or not the "psychological scare campaign" envisioned by Edward Barrett or the use of NSC-68 as a "bludgeon" in Acheson's hands would have eventually proved sufficient to bring order to this confused agenda will probably never be known, for on June 24th, 1950, communist forces halfway around the globe provided a bludgeon of their own by invading South Korea. Acheson himself gives a considerable amount of credit to the invasion as the prime force behind the adoption of NSC-68, noting that "...it is doubtful that anything like what happened in the next few years could have been done had not the Russians been stupid enough to have instigated the attack against South Korea."<sup>56</sup> Edward Barrett was even more blunt in his assessment. Noting the problems faced in getting the administration to unite behind NSC-68 throughout the spring, he stated: "We were sweating over it, and then...thank God, Korea came along."<sup>57</sup>

### Notes for Chapter 3

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1. Gaddis, Strategies of Containment; op. cit.: p. 107.
2. "Record of the State-Defense Policy Group Meeting, 10 March 1950;" FRUS 1950, Vol. I: p. 195.
3. Acheson, Present at the Creation, op. cit.: p. 455.
4. Ibid.: p. 489.
5. NSC-68, in FRUS 1950, Vol. I: pp. 238-41.
6. Lt. Gen. A. M. Gruenther to the Deputy Secretary of Defense, in Samuel F. Wells, "Sounding the Tocsin: NSC-68 and the Soviet Threat," International Security; Vol. 4, No. 2 (Fall 1979): pp. 126-127.
7. From estimates quoted in NSC-68, in FRUS 1950, Vol. I: p. 251.
8. Nitze, "Recent Soviet Moves," (Secret study dated 8 February 1950); in FRUS 1950, Vol. I: pp. 145-146.
9. Nitze, as recorded in the "Report of State-Defense Review Group Meeting, 27 February 1950;" in Ibid.: p. 171.
10. Ibid.: p. 170.
11. NSC-68, in FRUS 1950 Vol. I: p. 249.
12. Ibid.: p. 251.
13. Ibid.: p. 262.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid.: p. 265 (Emphasis added).
16. Nitze, as quoted in "Record of the State-Defense Policy Review Group Meeting," 10 March 1950; FRUS 1950, Vol. I:

p. 191.

17. Paul H. Nitze, "The Development of NSC-68;" in International Security; Vol. 4, No. 4 (Spring 1980) p. 170; and Paul Y. Hammond; "NSC-68: Prologue to Rearmament," in Schilling, Hammond and Snyder; Strategy, Politics, and Defense Budgets: Columbia University Press, N.Y.; 1962: p. 363.
18. Acheson, op. cit.: 489.
19. NSC-68, in FRUS 1950, Vol. I: p. 238.
20. Ibid.: p. 237.
21. Ibid.: p. 249.
22. Ibid.: pp. 251-52.
23. Ibid.: pp. 283-84.
24. Ibid.: p. 262.
25. Ibid.: p. 284.
26. Ibid.: p. 292 (emphasis added).
27. J. Robert Oppenheimer, in "Record of State-Defense Policy Review Group Meetings;" FRUS 1950, Vol. I: pp. 168 ff.
28. "Record of the Meeting of the State-Defense Policy Review Group," March 10, 1950, in FRUS 1950, Vol. I: 191.
29. Ibid..
30. Ibid..
31. He was appointed Deputy Secretary of Defense in September of 1950, at the same time General Marshall was brought in to replace Louis Johnson as Secretary of Defense.
32. FRUS 1950, Vol. I: p. 196.
33. Ibid.: p. 197.
34. Ibid.: p. 198-99.
35. FRUS 1950, Vol. I: pp. 199-200. Parenthetical phrase in the original.

36. Charles E. Bohlen, "Memorandum to the Director of the Policy Planning Staff (Nitze)," 5 April 1950; in FRUS 1950, Vol. I: p. 224.
37. Edward Barrett, "Memorandum to the Secretary of State," 6 April 1950; in FRUS 1950, Vol. I: p. 225.
38. Ibid.: p. 226.
39. Hammond, op. cit.: p. 320.
40. FRUS 1950, Vol. I: p. 235.
41. Acheson, op. cit.: p. 488.
42. Truman, "News Conference of May 25, 1950;" in Public Papers, 1950: p. 440.
43. Hammond, op. cit.: pp. 328-330.
44. Ibid.
45. "Memorandum of Acheson-Johnson telephone conversation, 5 June 1950;" in Gaddis, op. cit.: p. 113n.
46. Acheson, op. cit.: p. 489; and Gaddis: p. 108.
47. Acheson, "Threats to Democracy and Its Way of Life," in Department of State Bulletin; May 1, 1950: p. 673.
48. Ibid.: pp. 674-675.
49. Acheson, "Peace Through Strength: A Foreign Policy Objective," in Department of State Bulletin; 26 June 1950: pp. 1037-1039.
50. Ibid.
51. Truman, Public Papers, 1950: p. 457.
52. Hammond, op. cit.: p. 331ff provides an excellent analysis of this phenomenon.
53. U.S. News and World Report, (hereafter USNWR), 5 May 1950: p. 52.
54. USNWR, 19 May 1950: p. 7.
55. USNWR, 26 May 1950: cover, and p. 16.

56. Acheson, op. cit.: p. 488.

57. Quoted in James A. Nathan & James K. Oliver; United States Foreign Policy and World Order; Little Brown and Company, Boston; 1981: p. 118.

#### 4. Selling the Policy

While a great deal can be said for the point of view that the Korean War provided the impetus needed to move massive rearmament to the top of the administration's agenda for action, it would be a serious overstatement to claim that this assured the success of NSC-68. What the invasion of Korea did, in the words of Paul Hammond, was to "alter the whole frame of reference for American military policy."<sup>1</sup> In this context, Dean Acheson was undoubtedly correct when he told an executive session of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations that if there had not been an attack in Korea, "we would have had a terrible time getting people in this country to see the real danger in which the country is."<sup>2</sup> But at the time of the North Korean attack, the specific programs which would be required to implement NSC-68 were still in their formative stages. It would take several months of intensive effort to ensure that the country actually began to heed the call of NSC-68 by adopting those programs.

To be sure, one of the most tangible immediate effects of the invasion of South Korea was an administration request for a \$10 billion increase in its defense authorizations

for FY 1951. On the 19th of July, President Truman went before both the Congress and a national radio and television audience and called upon the country to "prepare ourselves better to fulfill our responsibilities toward the preservation of international peace and security against possible further aggression."<sup>3</sup> Reflecting the altered frame of reference for American military policy referred to by Hammond, Truman observed that "this attack has made it clear, beyond all doubt, that the international Communist movement is willing to use armed invasion to conquer independent nations."<sup>4</sup> To meet this threat, the President concluded, "it is apparent that the United States is required to increase its military strength and preparedness not only to deal with the aggression in Korea, but also to increase our common defense, with other free nations, against further aggression."<sup>5</sup> While the immediate increase requested by the White House was for \$10 billion, this actually represented only the first of four such requests between July and December of 1950, the cumulative effect of which was to raise the total amount asked for defense from the original \$13.5 billion to \$48.2 billion by the year's end.<sup>6</sup>

The President's message on 19 July clearly displayed the impact of NSC-68 on his thinking. Specifically, he divided his request for increased strength into three categories.

The first, and most urgent, was "to send additional men, equipment, and supplies to General MacArthur's command as rapidly as possible." The remaining two, however, were more long term in nature, and reflected the directions for American policy urged in NSC-68. As Truman put it: "In the second place, the world situation requires that we increase substantially the size and material support of our armed forces, over and above the increases which are needed in Korea;" and finally, "we must assist the free nations associated with us in common defense to augment their military strength."<sup>7</sup>

While the situation in Korea was obviously the most urgent source of his concern, a large portion of the President's request was drawn from NSC-68's assumption of the need for strengthening America's global military posture toward the Soviet Union, not just fighting a police action on an Asian peninsula. Nevertheless, the willingness of Congress to appropriate money for defense during a time of overt hostilities with Communist forces did not necessarily indicate a willingness to support the sort of long-range build-up of forces-in-being envisioned by the Policy Review Group, as debate over administration policies through the first quarter of 1951 was to prove. As had been noted in a memo by Assistant Deputy Secretary of State Llewellyn Thompson in April of 1950, "if the

conclusions [of NSC-68] are to be carried out, they would have to...have the full support not only of the administration, but of the Congress and public as well."<sup>8</sup> Korea may have won the battle within the administration, but it only set the stage for the fight in the other two arenas.

The administration's formal commitment to NSC-68 came on 30 September 1950, when, according to a memorandum written by the Executive Secretary of the NSC, the President and the National Security Council "adopted the Conclusions of NSC 68 as a statement of policy to be followed over the next four or five years, and agreed that the implementing programs will be put into effect as rapidly as possible."<sup>9</sup> By this time, acting on the basis of the President's earlier instructions to provide a "clearer indication of the programs envisaged" in NSC-68, an ad hoc committee of the NSC, headed by NSC Secretary James Lay and Paul Nitze, was drafting recommendations for specific programs aimed at military preparedness, foreign military and economic assistance, civilian defense, stockpiling, public information, intelligence, and internal security.<sup>10</sup> As the year progressed, these programs underwent several modifications, which came to be known as NSC 68/1 through NSC 68/4. By December 14, 1950, with the adoption of NSC 68/4, the Security Council was clearly devoting the weight

of its efforts to those programs under the headings of "military preparedness" and "foreign military and economic assistance."<sup>11</sup>

Arguing that "a greatly increased scale and tempo of effort is required to enable us to overcome our present military inadequacy," NSC 68/4 called for "an effort to achieve, under the shield of a military build-up, an integrated political, economic, and psychological offensive designed to counter the current threat to national security posed by the Soviet Union."<sup>12</sup> Central to this effort was a build-up of military forces "as rapidly as practicable and with a target date no later than June 30, 1952" which would increase the size of the Army from its original FY 1951 projected level of 630,000 men to 1,353,000; increase the Air Force from 13,000 active aircraft to 16,650; and expand the Navy from 653 active ships to 1010.<sup>13</sup> These force estimates were developed based upon a "full consideration of the objectives of NSC 68," which meant that the additional forces were committed to a primary mission of providing "a reasonable initial defense of the Western Hemisphere and essential allied areas, particularly in Europe." The European focus of these recommendations was further stressed by a call for increasing the Mutual Defense Assistance Program (MDAP) appropriations "to provide nations which are participants in the North

Atlantic Treaty with those quantities and forms of military and economic aid which they will require in order to raise, organize, train and equip by 1954 the forces...necessary for the defense of the North Atlantic Treaty area."<sup>14</sup>

It was obvious from the recommendations of the ad hoc committee on NSC 68 that they recognized a need to move the country far beyond a mere response to the Korean War in implementing the proposals of NSC 68 itself. They also recognized that this might not be an easy matter, despite the impact of Korea. As James Lay indicated in his memorandum establishing the ad hoc committee, it was also necessary to consider how the administration might develop "an adequate political and economic framework for the achievement of our long-range objectives."<sup>15</sup> Toward this end, he called for the White House to begin "consultations with Congressional leaders [to obtain] non-partisan legislative support for NSC-68," and to plan a campaign for "presentation to the public [of the facts necessary] to build public support for the policies of NSC-68."<sup>16</sup> Secretary of State Acheson reflected a similar position in his briefing to the President during the National Security Council meeting at which NSC 68/4 was approved, concluding with the exhortation that "the essential requirement is united and vigorous national action now to transform our potential strength into strength in being."<sup>17</sup>

President Truman was clearly aware of the need for such efforts when he endorsed the program recommendations of NSC 68/4. In the weeks prior to adopting those recommendations, the President held a series of highly publicized meetings with Congressional representatives to discuss "matters concerning the defense and foreign policy of the United States."<sup>18</sup> On December 13, the day before NSC 68/4 was approved, the President, the Secretary of State, and the Secretary of Defense held a final conference with a "bipartisan delegation of Congressional leaders," following which the White House released a statement claiming that "there had been unanimous support for the rapid expansion of national military strength."<sup>19</sup>

The declaration of "unanimous support" proved to be somewhat premature. As Congress began its deliberations, opposition by Republican leaders committed to reduced government spending and fewer overseas commitments threatened to block the allocation of men, money, and material which would be necessary to support the programs of NSC-68. Senator Robert A. Taft of Ohio, the chairman of the Senate Republican Policy Committee, led the attack on the administration's proposals, opposing the formation of a heavy U.S. Army or an increased commitment to the defense of Europe on the grounds that such a policy would

constitute "the greatest incitement to war with Russia."<sup>20</sup> Charging that the Democratic administration had been formulating foreign and defense policy since 1945 "without consulting the Congress or the people," Taft argued that the country should rely on supremacy in atomic weapons to deter Soviet moves in Europe, and held that if there was to be a build-up of conventional forces, it should concentrate on the naval and air defenses of the American homeland instead of global confrontation "on the enemy's chosen battle ground."<sup>21</sup> In effect, his view of the basis for U.S. foreign and defense policy was diametrically opposed to the underlying concepts of NSC-68.

As the Congress returned from its Christmas and New Year's recess in early 1951, two key proposals came to represent the focal point of conflict over the implementation of NSC-68 in what was termed the "Great Debate" on Truman's foreign policy: an increase by four divisions (from two to six) in the number of U.S. troops permanently based in Europe; and the authorization of a \$7.5 billion economic and military assistance package under the terms of the Mutual Security Act of 1951.<sup>22</sup> Not surprisingly, the battle in the Congress set the tone for the battle for public support, as the administration sought to build public willingness to support the militarization of containment through both higher taxes and increased

military service. Unfortunately for the supporters of NSC-68, not only did they face conservative Republican opposition on both of these issues, but both were policies to which the administration had itself been strongly opposed just the year before. It was, as one study put it, "a classical case where the aims of foreign policy...run up against the constraints of domestic politics."<sup>23</sup> However, it had been with an eye toward overcoming just such constraints that NSC-68 had been drafted in the first place.

The use of NSC-68 in Congressional testimony by administration spokesmen had been evident since hearings opened on the first supplemental defense appropriation in July 1950. Making a clear connection between NSC-68 and the administration's calls for increased defense spending in the aftermath of Korea, Louis Johnson told the Senate Committee on Appropriations that "the plans covering the build-up of our forces are based upon studies which began immediately after the President's announcement of the Soviet atomic explosion last September."<sup>24</sup> Secretary of State Acheson, who had taken the case for NSC 68 to the public in his speeches prior to the Korean War, echoed the document forcefully in his congressional testimony as well:

The security of the United States depends upon the rapid strengthening of the common defensive capacity of the free world. The defense of the

United States itself is dependent upon, and cannot be treated separately from, the defense of the community of the free nations as a whole. Their potential strength, as well as ours, must be mobilized to the maximum extent practicable for purposes of the common defense.<sup>25</sup>

While the administration worked on developing the specific programs necessary for such a mobilization, details about NSC 68's depiction of the Soviet threat and its recommendations for U.S. responses were generally confined to closed sessions of Congressional hearings, in accordance with Presidential directives that "there should be no public discussion of this program, and specifically no public quotation of figures, until the appropriate time as determined by the President."<sup>26</sup> As Congressmen grew alarmed by the picture presented in these closed sessions, however, they began to privately urge administration officials to "carefully consider the question of making available for public discussion in a government like ours which is based on public opinion, these facts."<sup>27</sup>

This, of course, had been the intention of the drafters of NSC 68 all along. By 15 December 1950, the rhetoric of NSC-68 was clearly in evidence as President Truman went before the American people in a national radio and television broadcast to declare a state of national emergency. "I am talking to you tonight," he began, "about what our country is up against:"

Our homes, our Nation, all the things we believe in are in great danger. This danger has been created by the rulers of the Soviet Union.... The future of civilization depends on what we do - on what we do now, and in the months ahead.... All of us will have to pay more taxes and do without things we like....[because] measured against the danger that confronts us, our forces are not adequate.... We must...work with the other free nations to strengthen our combined defenses...build up our own Army, Navy, and Air Force, and make more weapons for ourselves and our allies.

While the President was able to make a strong public case by drawing on the concepts of NSC-68, he was hampered to some extent in getting his message across by the fact that the debate he was joining had strong partisan overtones. The Republican National Committee had already made the Truman administration's defense policies a key target in the November 1950 Congressional elections.<sup>29</sup> Now, as the 82nd Congress convened in January of 1951, it was evident that unless some sort of bipartisan support could be built for the administration's proposals, there were no guarantees that the public would be willing to make the sort of sacrifices the President was calling for. After all, as one news magazine had noted earlier in the year, "the Cold War tends to heat up...each year at about the time that Congress is getting ready to decide the size of military appropriations."<sup>30</sup> To many people, even in the context of the ongoing war in Korea, a large part of the debate over NSC-68 must have looked like "politics as

usual."

Fortunately for the cause of the administration, the creation of the needed bipartisan support had already begun, its seeds sown in the March recommendations of Chester Barnard and Robert Lovett that the government might be helped in its campaign by a panel of "worthy citizens" who "had not been tarred with the Administration's brush in the eyes of the people."<sup>31</sup> In his March testimony, Barnard had mentioned the possibility that someone like James B. Conant, the President of Harvard University, would make a fitting member of such a group.<sup>32</sup> In August of 1950, Conant was approached by Tracy Voorhees, who was a member of the National Security Council's Ad Hoc Committee in charge NSC-68's planning, with the proposal that he "get a group of distinguished citizens together, draw up a program, put it before the public, get people to write Congress and, in general, respond to the gravity of the situation."<sup>33</sup> Conant, who had himself been one of the citizen consultants who reviewed NSC-68 for the Policy Review Group, was attracted to the idea, but noted that such a group "could be effective only if it were welcomed (unofficially but sincerely) by the administration."<sup>34</sup>

In September of 1950, Robert Lovett himself re-entered government service as Deputy Secretary of Defense, and it

was he whom Tracy Voorhees approached to arrange such an "unofficial but sincere" welcome.<sup>35</sup> Not surprisingly, given his own call for the creation of just such a group only months before, Lovett was enthusiastic, and suggested that Secretary of Defense Marshall be made aware of the group's plans. Conant subsequently drafted a letter to the Secretary on behalf of the group which succinctly stated their purpose:

We are a small group of interested citizens who have been pondering the President's statement of September ninth that "The danger that the free world faces is so great that we cannot be satisfied with less than an all-out effort by everyone."

We feel that bringing about in fact the "all-out effort" of which the President speaks will become far more difficult with the ending of the Korean War. We believe that even yet the gravity of the civilized world's peril is not adequately understood, and that it will not be easy to obtain action to take and carry out the hard decisions necessary.

We have felt that a useful purpose might be served by enlarging our group into a citizens committee wholly nonpolitical in character, acting without partisan or other criticism of the past. Specifically, we have thought that one way in which such a committee might be of help would be in strengthening the public support for such stern measures as may be necessary.<sup>36</sup>

When Marshall responded in late November by giving his endorsement to what he termed "an undertaking of great importance," it was decided that the time was ripe for the group to publicly announce its existence and intentions.<sup>37</sup>

Thus it was that on December 13th, 1950, just two days prior to President Truman's declaration of a state of emergency, the front page of the New York Times announced the creation of the Committee on the Present Danger, described by the Times' reporter as being "composed of twenty-five leaders in American life...including leading scientists and educators."<sup>38</sup> In its own statement, reprinted in full by the Times, the Committee described itself as having been "formed in the American tradition by civilians acting on a nonpartisan basis."<sup>39</sup> Clearly the group of "worthy citizens" who would provide independent support for the administration's endorsement of NSC-68 had arrived.

The statement issued by the Committee that day set the tone for most of its subsequent announcements. Not surprisingly, given the close association of its founders with the basic document, sections of the Committee's press release appeared to be paraphrased almost directly from arguments in NSC-68 itself:

The aggressive designs of the Soviet Union are unmistakably plain.... Unless an adequate support for the atomic potential of the United States is brought into existence, the time may soon come when all of Continental Europe can be forced into the Communist fold.

In our view, the necessary support...is an allied force in being strong enough to furnish effective resistance to military aggression.... That force does not exist. To meet the need, it

must be promptly built. To create it, the United States must take the leadership. Our part will call for greater sacrifices than any our people have yet been prepared for.... It will render necessary a sharp reduction in Government spending for non-defense purposes.

The doubt is not whether such a program is too arduous. The doubt is whether it is arduous enough. Certainly it is not nearly as drastic as the conditions which make it necessary. The price is high, but we believe it must be paid.<sup>40</sup>

The arrival on the scene of Lovett's "group of paraphrasers" could not have come at a better time from the Truman administration's point of view. On December 20th, former President Herbert Hoover fired a strong salvo in the "Great Debate" on the Truman national security program by issuing a "demand for a new foreign policy" in a nationwide radio and television broadcast. In it, he called for virtual abandonment of Western Europe and a retrenchment to "preserve this Western Hemisphere Gibraltar" through reducing expenses and balancing the budget.<sup>41</sup> Significantly, on the page facing the one on which they ran the text of ex-President Hoover's statement, the Times ran a rebuttal of that statement by Committee on the Present Danger member Robert Patterson.<sup>42</sup>

In January of 1951, President Truman provided his own rejoinder to those who were "whispering of a return to isolationism" in the form of his State of the Union Address to Congress. As with his national emergency speech, it was

evident that the concepts of NSC-68 formed the core of his arguments: "The threat of world conquest by Soviet Russia endangers our liberty and endangers the kind of world in which the free spirit of man can survive," he began, echoing almost directly the "hope of the future" theme of NSC-68. He continued in a similar vein, noting that:

The imperialism of the czars has been replaced by an even more ambitious...crafty...and menacing imperialism of the rulers of the Soviet Union. This new imperialism has powerful military forces.... The present rulers of the Soviet Union have shown that they are willing to use this power to destroy the free nations and win domination over the whole world.<sup>43</sup>

To meet this threat, the President called upon Congress to reject partisan rivalries and "stand together as Americans" in support of administration programs which would "give priority to activities that are urgent - like military procurement," while practicing "rigid economy in its non-defense activities."<sup>44</sup> As the Congressional session got underway, however, Republican attacks on the proposals to send additional troops to Europe and the Mutual Security Act funding levels made it clear that such bipartisan support was not to be found in the legislative branch.

Opposition to the administration's proposals in the Senate quickly crystallized around the positions of Senator Taft, who was known as "Mr. Republican," and Senate Minority Leader Kenneth S. Wherry (R-Neb.). Taft was

particularly adamant in his opposition to sending troops to Europe, maintaining that "we had better commit no American troops to the European Continent at this time."<sup>45</sup> His views were echoed, although in somewhat more moderate form, by Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr., (R-Mass.) who argued that the U.S. "should not commit one single additional soldier to Europe without an iron-clad agreement that the dispatch of that soldier means the automatic commitment of a very much larger number of European soldiers."<sup>46</sup> Senator Wherry couched his opposition in constitutional terms, introducing a resolution which would have prohibited the President from dispatching forces to Europe without first obtaining specific Congressional authorization. The Wherry Resolution was further incorporated into a "Declaration of Policy" in the House of Representatives, in which 120 of the Republican members endorsed a statement by Representative Lawrence H. Smith (R-Wis.) which assailed the administration's policies as "dangerous" with the potential of "tragic results."<sup>47</sup>

Senator Taft also led the Republican resistance to the Mutual Security Act, where he recommended cutting the amount of economic aid planned for Europe in half. Here, the administration's earlier campaign to sell the need for a sound economy as the basis for military security came back to haunt the President and his advisors. Despite

testimony from administration witnesses such as General Omar Bradley that even the full \$8.5 billion asked by the President might not be enough, congressional critics like Senator George Malone (R-Nev.) charged that "the American taxpayers are unable to carry the burden of the foreign aid program."<sup>48</sup> Other Republicans went even further, and argued with Representative Usher Burdick (R-N.D.) that the whole program was unnecessary. "Over five years has elapsed since the shooting in World War II stopped," Burdick explained, "and Western Europe has been exposed to overwhelming Russian armies ever since - but no trouble has broken out, and in my opinion no trouble will break out."<sup>49</sup>

While the Congressional opposition to the programs called for by NSC-68 was clearly concentrated in Taft's wing of the Republican party, the administration's Democratic supporters rallied to defend the proposals, prompting "Mr. Republican" to comment that he was "shocked at the speed with which 'blind partisans' had rushed to the defense...of the President."<sup>50</sup> The President attempted, with only marginal success, to bridge this partisan gap by privately warning the leaders of both parties that reductions in the administration's programs "would seriously interfere with the fight against communism."<sup>51</sup> It soon became apparent that a more effective form of pressure than private meetings might be brought to bear by focusing public

attention on the administration's opponents. Representative Abraham Ribicoff (D-Conn.) was aware of this potential when he confronted those arguing for cuts in the Mutual Security Program during a House debate by observing:

Now it is all right for you gentlemen to go back to your home districts and say that we have cut this bill and that we have saved \$500 million. But will you be frank enough to go back to your district and tell your people that at the same time you<sup>52</sup> are hurting the security of the United States?

As the debate in Congress heated up, so did the efforts of the Committee on the Present Danger to cast the public debate in precisely the terms suggested by Representative Ribicoff. Throughout the early months of 1951, the Committee issued a series of press statements stressing the group's non-partisan nature and urging the public to support the administration's position. As far as can be determined, every statement released by the Committee received full coverage in the media, with the New York Times frequently giving them headlines on the front page.<sup>53</sup> Typical was the page one article generated by their press conference the day after the President's State of the Union Address, which the Times featured in part because it "came at a time when the nation's foreign policy was being debated, both in the new Eighty-second Congress and in forums elsewhere in the country."<sup>54</sup> Calling specifically for support on sending troops to NATO, the statement read,

in part:

On these problems, the Committee on the Present Danger ventures, completely without partisanship, to present its deeply held convictions.

Certain facts are beyond dispute:

A menacing despotic power, bent on conquering the world, has twice in recent months in Korea resorted to aggression.<sup>55</sup> Europe is the next great prize Russia seeks.

The first week in March, the Committee stepped up its activities, beginning a series of weekly nationwide radio broadcasts over the Mutual Broadcasting System.<sup>56</sup> By this time, the Committee consisted of approximately 45 members, many of whom were frequent guests at State Department and Pentagon briefing sessions in Washington, in which they were afforded access to classified information including NSC-68 and its supporting documents.<sup>57</sup> This information was extensively used in support of the Committee's broadcasts as, in James Conant's words, they "kept hammering away at the same theme - the present danger and the need for America to wake up."<sup>58</sup> In fact, as an extensive study of their activities during this period put it,

The Committee's concern was how, and to what extent, to go public with NSC-68. The idea was to squeeze the isolationist diehards between the Administration and a popular groundswell. If successful, this strategy would isolate the isolationists from their crucial base of support in mass opinion.<sup>59</sup>

The strategy appears to have worked, for according to

Gallup polls published in early April, one month after the Committee's broadcasts began, public opinion favored the proposition that "the U.S. should send more troops to Europe" by a margin of 53% to 33%.<sup>60</sup> On the fourth of April, the same week as the polls were released, the three month long Senate debate on sending troops to Europe came to an end with a successful 69-21 vote for the administration position.<sup>61</sup> It had not been quite as easy as the size of the vote makes it appear, however. An attempt to get an identically worded concurrent resolution through both the House and Senate passed the Senate by only 45-41, and failed to even reach a vote in the House.<sup>62</sup> Still, given the fact that just two months earlier opinion polls had shown 64% of the public supporting a statement similar to the Wherry Resolution and the Republican "Declaration of Policy," it is an indication of the success of the campaign waged by the administration and the Committee on the Present Danger that Congress was unable to pass a measure opposed to the President's position.<sup>63</sup>

Although debate on the foreign military and economic aid package in the Mutual Security Act continued into the fall, by the first week in October the administration had won that battle in both the House and Senate. The final measure, calling for nearly \$6 billion in military aid and \$1.5 billion in economic assistance (or about \$1 billion

less than originally requested) passed the Senate by a 56-21 roll-call on 2 October, and the House by 235-98 three days later.<sup>64</sup> The President signed the bill into law on 10 October 1951.<sup>65</sup> From this point on, NSC-68 can be considered to have been, without question, American national policy, a fact which was reaffirmed by NSC policy reviews in 1952 (NSC 135/3) and early 1953 (NSC 141).<sup>66</sup> For the remainder of the Truman administration the governmental, media, and public agendas were all in agreement, and the concept of military containment of the Soviet Union was not seriously challenged again until the 1960s.

The exact degree of influence of any one particular factor in securing the adoption of NSC-68 and the militarization of containment policy is impossible to ascertain. Clearly the outbreak of the Korean War was a factor, as was the intense lobbying effort by those within the administration who supported the premises upon which NSC-68 was founded. To no small extent, however, credit must be given to the manner in which the administration was able to "sell" NSC-68 to the public, through both its own direct efforts and those of its allied opinion elites. As James Conant noted in his memoirs, "I have always cherished the thought that the Committee on the Present Danger, by its statements and the broadcasts of several members,

played an important role in shaping public opinion on this issue."<sup>67</sup>

It seems evident, moreover, that the efforts of the administration and its supportive opinion elites were clearly furthered by the degree to which NSC-68 itself had been drafted precisely for the purpose of influencing opinion and shaping consensus. It was used within the administration to win over the President. It served as the basis for administration testimony to the Congress. And it was the source text for much of the public campaign of both administration spokesmen such as Dean Acheson and the non-governmental spokesmen of the Committee on the Present Danger. In virtually every possible respect, the document was used to fulfill its own stated goal of making it "possible for the American people and the American Government to arrive at a consensus."<sup>68</sup>

From the perspective of those who had been engaged in drafting NSC-68, their efforts clearly served the purpose for which the document had been intended. As Paul Nitze observed in reaffirming the principles of NSC-68 in 1952, it was necessary that "the United States should undertake systematically and consistently a program of clarifying to the American public...the complex problems of the free world in meeting the Soviet threat, the nature of that

threat, the strength and resources the free world possesses to meet that threat, and, to the extent possible, the reasoning behind the general lines of policy and action..., in order to secure that public understanding and support which is essential to the success of our policies and actions.<sup>69</sup> NSC-68 was an integral part of this process throughout 1950 and 1951.

Yet John Lewis Gaddis has described NSC-68 as "a deeply flawed document" precisely because it was primarily a "work of advocacy."<sup>70</sup> Paul Hammond reflects a similar sentiment when he observes that in NSC-68, "the purpose had been to make the point as strong as possible before practical considerations closed its readers' minds to sympathetic consideration of the line of argument."<sup>71</sup> Both scholars are obviously concerned that a document which has been described elsewhere as "one of the key historical documents of the Cold War," which "asked the United States to assume unilaterally the defense of the free world at a tremendous price and with no hesitation" was designed primarily as a sales pitch.<sup>72</sup>

The problem is not a new one. It is, in fact, the basic dilemma which arises out of the need to build public support for foreign policy in a democracy; a dilemma noted by De Tocqueville when he wrote:

Democracy appears to me better adapted for the conduct of society in times of peace, or for a sudden effort of remarkable vigor, than for the prolonged endurance of the great storms which beset the political existence of nations.... Foreign politics demand scarcely any of those qualities which are peculiar to a democracy.... [A] democracy can only with great difficulty regulate the details of an important undertaking, persevere in a fixed design, and work out its execution.... It cannot combine its measures with secrecy or await their consequences with patience.<sup>73</sup>

It appears to be this same pessimistic outlook on the inability of a democracy to build public support for its foreign policy in a calm and rational manner which runs throughout the framework of NSC-68. It was clearly this concern which Edward Barrett expressed when he observed that "in the absence of a real and continuing crisis, a dictatorship can unquestionably out-last a democracy in a conventional arms race."<sup>74</sup> Even Charles Bohlen, in a critique of NSC-68 based on his view that it overstated the Soviet threat, felt compelled to conclude that "I do not wish to belabor this point since it is obviously better to over-simplify in the direction of greater urgency and danger than it is to over-simplify the side of complacency when dealing with Soviet intentions."<sup>75</sup> These views are even reflected in the language of the document itself, which laments that "the very virtues of our system...handicap us in certain respects," and goes on to the sad conclusion that:

In coping with dictatorial governments acting in secrecy and with speed we are vulnerable in that the democratic process necessarily operates in the open and at a deliberate tempo. Weaknesses in our situation are readily apparent and subject to immediate exploitation. This Government therefore cannot afford in the face of the totalitarian challenge to operate on a narrow margin of strength. A democracy can compensate for its natural vulnerability only if it maintains clearly superior overall power in its most inclusive sense.<sup>76</sup>

Given such a foundation for the beliefs of those who labored to develop NSC-68, there can be little doubt as to why Acheson chose to use a "bludgeon" as his tool for transmitting "communicable wisdom!"

#### Notes for Chapter 4

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1. Paul Hammond, "NSC-68: Prologue to Rearmament;" op. cit.: p. 345.
  2. Acheson, "Statement by the Secretary of State, Monday, July 24, 1950;" in Reviews of the World Situation: 1949-1950; Hearings held in Executive Session before the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, 81st Congress, 1st and 2nd sessions; USGPO, 1974: p. 323.
  3. Truman, "Special Message to the Congress Reporting on the Situation in Korea;" in Public Papers, 1950: p. 536.
  4. Truman, "Radio and Television Address to the American People on the Situation in Korea;" in ibid.: p. 537.
  5. Truman, "Special Message to Congress..." op. cit.: p. 532.
  6. Gaddis, Strategies of Containment; op. cit.: p. 113.
  7. Truman, "Special Message to the Congress..." in Public Papers, 1950; op. cit.: p. 532, emphasis added.
  8. Llewellyn Thompson, "Memo to the Secretary of State," 3 April 1950; in FRUS 1950, Vol. I: p. 214.
  9. FRUS, 1950 Vol. I: p. 400.
  10. From "Objectives and Programs for National Security," a report to the President attached to NSC 68/3, in FRUS 1950, Vol. I: pp. 468-473.
  11. Ibid.
  12. Ibid.: p. 469.
  13. Figures drawn from Department of Defense Appropriations for 1951, hearings before the subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations, U.S. Senate; 81st Congress, 2nd Session

(13 March - 26 April 1950); USGPO 1950: pp. 122-123, 220-221, and 514; and NSC 68/4 in FRUS 1950, Vol. I: pp. 475-477.

14. FRUS 1950, Vol. I: pp. 469-470.

15. Lay. "Memorandum to the Ad Hoc Committee on NSC 68"; 28 April 1950; in FRUS 1950, Vol. I: p. 296.

16. Ibid.

17. "Briefing paper for use by the Secretary of State," NSC Meeting, 14 December 1950; in FRUS 1950, Vol. I: pp. 466-467.

18. NYT, 1 Dec. 1950: p. 1; and 14 Dec. 1950: p. 1.

19. FRUS 1950, Vol. I: P. 478.

20. "Troops to Europe," Congressional Quarterly Almanac, 1951; Congressional Quarterly News Features, Washington D.C.; Vol. VII, 1951: p. 220.

21. Ibid.: pp. 220-221.

22. Ibid.: pp. 204, 220; and Jerry Sanders, Peddlers of Crisis: The Committee on the Present Danger and the Politics of Containment; South End Press, Boston; 1983: pp. 86-88.

23. Sanders, op. cit.: p. 62.

24. Supplemental Appropriations for 1951, Hearings before the Committee on Appropriations, U.S. Senate; 81st Congress, 2nd Session; USGPO 1950: p. 39.

25. Ibid.: pp. 265-266.

26. FRUS 1950, Vol. I: p. 400.

27. Lodge, in Reviews of the World Situation: 1949-1950; op. cit.: p. 430.

28. Truman; Public Papers, 1950: pp. 741-746.

29. NYT; 7 February 1950: p. 20.

30. U.S. News and World Report; 14 April 1950: p. 8.

31. FRUS 1950, Vol. I: pp. 199-200.

32. Ibid.: p. 191.
33. Sanders, op. cit.: p. 61.
34. James B. Conant; My Several Lives: Memoirs of a Social Inventor; Harper & Row, New York; 1970: p. 510.
35. Sanders: p. 66.
36. Conant: p. 511, emphasis added.
37. Ibid.: pp. 511-512.
38. NYT, 13 Dec 1950: pp. 1 and 19. See Appendix III for a full list of those who eventually participated in the Committee.
39. Ibid.: p. 19.
40. NYT, 13 Dec 1950: p. 19.
41. NYT, 21 Dec 1950: pp. 1 and 22.
42. ibid.: p. 21.
43. Truman, Public Papers, 1951: p. 7.
44. Ibid.: pp. 12-13.
45. Congressional Quarterly Almanac; Vol. VII (1951): p. 221.
46. Ibid.: p. 222.
47. Ibid.: p. 225.
48. Ibid.: p. 209.
49. Ibid.: p. 207.
50. Ibid.: p. 223.
51. Ibid.: p. 209.
52. Ibid.: p. 207.
53. Not a particularly surprising finding, given the Committee membership of Edward R. Murrow and New York Times editor Julius Ochs Adler.
54. NYT; 8 Jan 1951: p. 1.

55. NYT; 8 Jan 1951: p. 7.
56. NYT; 5 Mar 1951: p. 1.
57. Sanders; op. cit.: p. 93.
58. Conant, op. cit.: p. 519.
59. Sanders: p. 90.
60. George H. Gallup, The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion 1935-1971; Random House, N.Y.; 1971: Vol. II, p. 975. Unfortunately, no comparable question was asked prior to this date, making it impossible to detect any actual shift in public opinion on this issue.
61. Congressional Quarterly Almanac; Vol. VII, 1951: p. 220.
62. Ibid.
63. Gallup, op. cit.; "Poll released 9 Feb. 1951": p. 967.
64. Congressional Quarterly Almanac; Vol. VII, 1951: p. 211.
65. Ibid.
66. For NSC 135/3, see FRUS 1952-1954: Vol. II, pp. 143-157. For NSC 141, see ibid.: pp. 209-222.
67. Conant; op. cit.: p. 517.
68. NSC-68, in FRUS 1950, Vol. I: p. 254.
69. Nitze, "Statement of Policy Drafted by the Director of the Policy Planning Staff;" in FRUS 1952-1954; Vol. II: p. 72. Emphasis added.
70. Gaddis; op. cit.: p. 106.
71. Hammond, op. cit.: p. 361.
72. The description of NSC-68 is from Walter LaFeber, America, Russia, and the Cold War, 1945-1966; John Wiley & Sons, N.Y.; 1967: pp. 90-91.
73. Alexis De Tocqueville, Democracy in America; Vintage Press, N.Y.; 1954 edition: pp. 237-244.

74. FRUS, 1950: Vol. I, p. 225.
75. Bohlen, "Memorandum to the Director of the Policy Planning Staff (Nitze)," in FRUS 1950: Vol. I, p. 222.
76. NSC-68, in FRUS 1950: Vol. I, p. 255.

### Section III

#### Alice and Sputnik in Wonderland: The Curious Life and Death of the Missile Gap

"Indeed, the 'missile gap' - its birth, growth, and early death - had an Alice-in-Wonderland quality about it which could flourish only in a democracy."

Hanson W. Baldwin

#### 5. Conflicting Agendas and the Birth of the Missile Gap: The President, the Kremlin, the Congress and the Media

On October 4, 1957, the Soviet Union launched Sputnik I into earth orbit, dramatically demonstrating that there was more than one way to bludgeon an issue onto the consciousness of the American public. Just seven months earlier, a nation-wide poll had discovered that less than 50% of the American public had ever heard of "space satellites."<sup>1</sup> Now, in the first week after the launching of Sputnik, there were over 30 articles dealing with missiles and space in the New York Times alone.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, both front page articles and editorial comment saw the Russian achievement as a "sign of Soviet superiority in missile development."<sup>3</sup>

In placing Sputnik into orbit, it was clear that the

Soviet Union also had placed the issue of a "missile gap" firmly on the agenda of the American mass media. In fact, from October 1957 until the end of the Eisenhower administration, not a single month went by in which the "space race" with the Soviet Union or the so-called "missile gap" between Russia and the United States were not part of a major news story.<sup>4</sup> As President Eisenhower himself subsequently observed, "Sputnik...color[ed] the events of the next three years, including the 1960 election."<sup>5</sup>

Yet the so-called "missile gap" was an issue which the Eisenhower administration had never wished to see placed on either its own or the public agenda. The President was convinced that the "gap" was never a legitimate threat, and said so repeatedly. In the three and one half years of the Eisenhower administration which followed the launching of Sputnik, the Public Papers of the President record no fewer than 50 instances in which the President used press conferences or radio and television addresses to play down or deny the existence of a significant "gap" between American and Soviet military capabilities.<sup>6</sup> He held instead to the view that "our total defense capabilities - including manned bombers, emerging long-range ballistic missiles, and nuclear weapons of all kinds - had a superiority overwhelming enough to deter the Soviet leaders

from aggression."<sup>7</sup> Given Eisenhower's position, it seems probable that had it been possible for the President and his administration to dismiss the missile gap controversy, they would have done so. But by the President's own account, it was "no exaggeration to say that, during all the months while our scientists were struggling to perfect the reliability and effectiveness of our missiles, there was rarely a day when I failed to give earnest study to reports of our progress and to estimates of Soviet capabilities."<sup>8</sup>

Congress also found itself preoccupied with the subject. In the three months following the launching of Sputnik alone, one single Senate subcommittee heard 90 witnesses, interviewed 250 "experts," and generated nearly 1400 pages of testimony as part of an "Inquiry into Satellite and Missile Programs."<sup>9</sup> By early 1961, committees in both the House and Senate had combined to hold over 20 separate sets of hearings on the subject, prompting one subsequent study to characterize the entire second Eisenhower administration as being "marked by vigorous debate over America's relative defense posture and the emerging Soviet threat."<sup>10</sup> Clearly there were factors other than the will of the Eisenhower administration at work in keeping the "missile gap" an issue on the public and governmental agendas during this period.

As this study will show, it is one of the hallmarks of the American democratic process that a wide variety of sources have the opportunity to place and maintain issues on the national agenda through their access to the public by way of the mass media. Indeed, it was in direct response to this phenomenon that news columnist Hanson W. Baldwin eventually came to describe the missile gap as having "an Alice-in-Wonderland quality about it which could only flourish in a democracy."<sup>11</sup> Ultimately, this so-called missile gap came to be seen in much the same light as Alice finally saw her antagonists in Wonderland: as "nothing but a pack of cards." But, as the evidence presented here will clearly demonstrate, for three years those cards were played by a multitude of actors seeking to keep the missile gap on the public agenda. Even actors from outside the United States were involved, as a combination of Soviet propaganda statements, unauthorized leaks from secret administration studies (such as the "Gaither Report"), Congressional investigations, partisan infighting, and military service rivalries all served to keep the issue in the public eye throughout most of Eisenhower's second administration.

In a broad sense, it is the means by which these various interests were able to accomplish this feat in the face of

Administration opposition which forms the core of this study. At the same time, what these interests were unable to accomplish is of equal, if not greater, importance to understanding the nature of the relationship between the government and the media in forging consensus behind national security policies. One of the key lessons to be gleaned from this study of the missile gap is that the ability of "communicable wisdom" to actually move the country to action is highly dependent upon who is doing the communicating. Unlike the situation which obtained as a consensus was built around the policies of NSC-68, those who favored a massive increase in defense spending to "close" the missile gap in the late 1950s were never able to gain the support of the President behind their efforts. As a result, the consensus necessary to actually force a shift in the basic defense policies of Eisenhower's "New Look" failed to materialize, despite the fact that the issue of the missile gap became a near fixture in the media and public agendas in the aftermath of the 1957 launching of Sputnik I.

It was the fact that Sputnik had already placed the issue on the public agenda which, more than any other single factor, ensured its consideration by the administration. Eisenhower recalls that he felt it his duty to "find ways of affording perspective to our people and so relieve the

current wave of near-hysteria" which he saw gripping the country in the aftermath of Sputnik.<sup>12</sup> It would have been difficult, if not politically impossible, for the administration to ignore an issue which generated over 350 articles, 72 of which were featured on page one, in the New York Times alone during the last three months of 1957.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, the issue of a "missile gap," once it had been raised in such a dramatic manner, refused to simply go away. The story continued to appear regularly on page one, with brief exceptions, through the end of the Eisenhower administration, leading one scholar to conclude that "[i]t is quite probable that no news story from the end of the Korean War to the intensification of the South East Asia conflict so pre-occupied the nation's political and communications elite for so long a stretch of time."<sup>14</sup> Coverage of the missile gap became so pervasive that President Eisenhower devoted a portion of his last news conference while in office to the complaint that "almost every one of your magazines...has a picture of the Titan missile or the Atlas..., becoming a great influence, almost an insidious penetration of our minds that the only thing this country is engaged in is weaponry and missiles."<sup>15</sup>

The fact that the issue also became a major part of the 1960 presidential election campaign did nothing to dampen the media's enthusiasm for the story. Only six days before

President Eisenhower had lodged his complaint with the media over the amount of coverage they were devoting to the issue, the New York Times had carried a statement by President-elect Kennedy reaffirming his campaign charges that "the United States' missile and space programs lagged behind the Soviet Union" and calling for a "crash program to develop a sophisticated and secure missile deterrent system."<sup>16</sup> Eisenhower, however, remained adamant in his conviction that the missile gap was vastly overrated, and during the final days of his term in office responded to Kennedy's charges by observing that "the 'bomber gap' of several years ago was always a fiction and the 'missile gap' shows every sign of being the same."<sup>17</sup> Moreover, even if Eisenhower had believed that the "gap" existed, the idea of a "crash program" to close it would have run directly counter to his fundamental belief in the necessity to maintain a long-term program which balanced defense spending with budgetary priorities. Ironically, it was this same concept of defense and budgetary priorities, as embodied in the defense policy of the "New Look" during Eisenhower's first term, which had done much to create the climate in which the charges of a missile gap were able to grow and flourish.

Like the Truman administration before it, the Eisenhower administration had come into office committed to the goal

of a balanced budget. The consensus which had grown around the concept of containment espoused in NSC-68 ensured that defense spending would not drop as low as it had in the immediate post World War II period, but Eisenhower was emphatic in his views that the concept of "national defense" involved a number of priorities which went beyond mere military spending. As the President put it in a special message to Congress four months after his inauguration:

In providing the kind of military security that our country needs, we must keep our people free and our economy solvent. We must not create a nation mighty in arms that is lacking in liberty and bankrupt in resources.<sup>18</sup>

It was clear, as one study of American defense policy during this period observed, that President Eisenhower intended to maintain a "sense of balance between defense spending and the economic necessities of the type of system he sought to defend."<sup>19</sup> He attempted to achieve this through a subtle shift from the means of containment as originally postulated under NSC-68 to a new concept of containment and deterrence which became known as the "New Look." This involved a defense policy designed to build up American military capabilities gradually, over what he called the "long pull," while relying on America's unchallenged strategic nuclear superiority and the threat of "massive retaliation" to deter Soviet military attempts

at expansion.<sup>20</sup> The idea was to avoid "crash programs" such as that which followed NSC-68, and to maintain instead a deterrent posture based primarily upon nuclear weapons within the confines of an "economically healthy" defense budget of \$38-\$40 billion dollars a year.<sup>21</sup>

Built upon the assumption that "economic stability and military strength were inseparable," the containment philosophy of the "New Look" became official policy with its adoption as NSC 162/2 in October 1953.<sup>22</sup> By that time, Eisenhower had already begun to implement the concepts of the policy, slashing the Truman administration's last defense appropriations request from \$41.2 billion to \$35.8 billion shortly after he took office.<sup>23</sup> In January of 1954, submitting his own budget message to Congress, he gave a succinct public summation of the principles underlying the "top secret" NSC 162/2. According to President Eisenhower:

With the shift in emphasis to the full exploitation of air power and modern weapons, we are in a position to support strong national security programs over an indefinite period with less of a drain on our manpower, material, and financial resources.<sup>24</sup>

The President was not alone in the campaign to build public support for the concepts contained in NSC-162/2. Little over a week prior to the President's budget message, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles gave what was perhaps the most widely publicized description of the "New Look's"

call for "more basic security at less cost." In a January 12, 1954 speech to the Council on Foreign Relations, the Secretary of State proclaimed that the administration had made "a basic decision" to adopt a national security policy that would "depend primarily upon a great capacity to retaliate, instantly, by means and at places of our own choosing."<sup>25</sup> While the Secretary's rhetoric stirred up considerable debate over what was implied by the concept of "massive retaliation" (a phrase he did not actually use in the speech), the message he and the President were taking to the public was generally effective. If there was a "cold war consensus," it existed most visibly in the support which seemed to coalesce around the policies of the "New Look" during Eisenhower's first term in office.<sup>26</sup>

The concept of the "New Look," however, depended on a clear American strategic nuclear superiority over the Soviet Union. As Eisenhower began his second term, both this strategic superiority and the consensus supporting the "New Look" policies were beginning to be called into question in articles and editorial columns in the news media. Several factors were involved in raising such questions, including increasing public evidence of frustrations within the military services over the defense spending caps of the New Look, and the associated congressional debates over whether such budgetary

restraints were reducing American military preparedness. Adding fuel to these fires was what appears to have been a concerted Soviet propaganda campaign aimed at convincing the Western powers that the Soviet Union was already capable of threatening them with missiles carrying atomic warheads.

The Soviet propaganda effort first seems to have made headline news in the United States in December of 1955, when the New York Times carried a speech by Premier Bulganin in which he implied that the USSR had already developed intercontinental missiles.<sup>27</sup> The claim was made more explicitly the following February by Kremlin Deputy Premier Mikoyan, who generated front page coverage by stating that the Soviet Union could "deliver H-bombs by rockets to any target in the world."<sup>28</sup> In April, Nikita Khrushchev joined in the chorus, in a speech to Western representatives at the London disarmament conference in which he was reported as threatening to use guided missiles with nuclear warheads against any country which attempted to pressure the Soviet Union.<sup>29</sup> Such threats became even more ominous later in the year during the Suez crisis, when Premier Bulganin publicly threatened the governments of Britain and France with rocket attacks if they failed to withdraw their troops from Egypt. This last incident is often credited with opening an era in which the Kremlin's

foreign policy was characterized as "missile diplomacy."<sup>30</sup>

As one congressional study described it:

"Rattling the saber" to obtain political advantage without actually getting into military combat is, of course, centuries old, but the first time missiles were mentioned in such a threat seems to have been in the Bulganin messages to France and Great Britain during the Suez incident.... From that date, the Soviets have kept up a steady stream of notes...[which] warn of the terrors of missile warfare which, the Soviets<sup>31</sup> point out, they are fully equipped to fight.

By early 1957, Pravda was running articles which spoke confidently about the success of the Soviet missile program in comparison with that of the U.S., claiming that "it is common knowledge that the United States is far from being a monopolist either in the sphere of nuclear weapons or, even less so, in the sphere of long range missiles. Here it would be more appropriate to talk of America's lag."<sup>32</sup> Such claims of an American missile "lag" were quickly picked up by those within the military services who were seeking increased funding for their own missile programs, and by their supporters in the Congress. By March, for example, Senator Henry Jackson (D-Washington) was calling for a rapid increase in the pace of the U.S. missile program to match what he saw as a Soviet program on the verge of developing "missiles with a 5,500 mile range."<sup>33</sup>

Throughout the spring and summer of 1957, the Eisenhower

administration endeavored to deflect the charges that its New Look policies of fiscal restraint were allowing the Soviet Union to surge ahead of the United States in the field of missile development. In April the administration announced that the United States was spending over \$4 billion on developing five ballistic missile types.<sup>34</sup> By mid-July, articles reflecting the administration viewpoint were generating front page headlines which proclaimed that the "US Believes it is Substantially Ahead of USSR in IRBM and ICBM Development."<sup>35</sup> Then, on August 27th, Americans picked up their morning newspapers to discover that "the Soviet Union announced last night that it had successfully tested an intercontinental ballistic missile.... [A] missile which could be directed into any part of the world."<sup>36</sup>

Administration spokesmen were quick to state that the announcement "does not automatically mean that the weapon is ready to go into production. Nor does it mean that the balance of power has been upset..."<sup>37</sup> The day after the announcement of the Soviet success, Secretary of State Dulles was able to command front page headlines with his assurance that "The Soviet Missile Will Not Tip Power Scales."<sup>38</sup> Nevertheless, the idea of unchallenged American strategic nuclear superiority upon which the New Look had been built was now clearly subject to serious questioning.

As the New York Times article carrying the initial Soviet claim of success had observed, "If the report is true, the Communist world has won what has been considered a critical race for the perfection of...the kind of missile that...has generally been referred to in the West as the 'ultimate weapon' within the reach of military science."<sup>39</sup>

The Soviet Union's successful testing of the first ICBM gave an air of validity to their earlier propaganda statements, and provided the foundation for a new round of assertions relating to the Kremlin's supposed military superiority over the West. An editorial in the New York Times the day after the announcement was quick to recognize the importance of this aspect of the Russian success, observing that:

It is clear that the immediate import of the Soviet achievement is likely to be primarily psychological and political. The Soviet rocket will now make it more possible than ever for the Kremlin to wage a war of propaganda terror against us and our allies, and we may well have much more use of the technique exemplified by last fall's implied threat to bombard France and Britain with rocket weapons.<sup>40</sup>

The Soviet Union wasted little time in living up to the expectations of the Times' editorial. The next day correspondent Max Frankel reported from Moscow that "the press and radio today began to adapt the missile to their propaganda requirements." The ICBM was said to have made

"disarmament on Soviet terms all the more urgent," while Soviet possession of a missile "capable of striking any part of the world" was expected to "cool down those hotheads in the United States." Significantly, Frankel observed that "claims of Soviet military superiority and technical achievement were made mostly with quotations from the Western press!"<sup>41</sup>

The willingness of the Western press to credit the Soviet Union with the superiority in weapons which had been reserved for the United States just the previous July was almost totally solidified on October 4th, when the Soviet Union added an exclamation point to their rocket program's claim to be the best in the world by placing Sputnik in orbit. Lest the point be lost on the American public, Khrushchev almost immediately granted U.S. journalist James Reston a three hour and twenty minute interview, during which the Soviet leader bragged:

I think I will not be revealing any military secrets if I tell you that we now have all the rockets we need: long-range rockets, intermediate-range rockets, and close-range rockets.... All these things are realities. When we announced the successful testing of an intercontinental missile, some American statesmen did not believe us. The Soviet Union, they claimed, was saying it had something it did not really have; now that we have successfully launched an earth satellite, only technically ignorant people can doubt this. The United States does not have an intercontinental ballistic missile, otherwise it also would have easily launched a satellite of its own. We can

launch satellites because we have a carrier for them, namely the ballistic missile. Such are the actual facts.<sup>42</sup> We must not deceive ourselves or other people.

The point was not lost. From the fall of 1957 through the end of the Eisenhower administration, the terms of the debate over the "missile gap" were no longer whether or not it existed, but how large and how serious it was. A typical view was reflected by Senator John Stennis when he observed during Congressional hearings on the issue that "it seems that all Government officials agree...that we do have this missile gap."<sup>43</sup> The President did not himself endorse the concept of a "gap," but did express his concern that the United States was not "further ahead" in the development of intercontinental ballistic missiles.<sup>44</sup> By November, even Secretary of State Dulles was quoted as having "acknowledged...that the Soviet Union was ahead of the United States in some respects in the missile field."<sup>45</sup>

Critics of the administration were somewhat less charitable. Senator Lyndon Johnson (D-Texas), charging that "the Russians handed us both a technological defeat and a propaganda defeat," labeled the administration's position as a "feeble denial of the facts of life."<sup>46</sup> By mid 1958, the "facts of life" were reported by one news columnist to be that the Soviet Union would enjoy an advantage of 2000 ICBMs to 130 for the U.S. within five

years.<sup>47</sup> While these figures represented the "high" side of the debate, by the time of the 1960 Presidential elections it was widely accepted as "fact" by articles in the mass media that the Soviet Union could be expected to maintain a 3:1 ratio of ICBM superiority over the United States throughout the early 1960s.<sup>48</sup> As the election campaign ran down, Senator Kennedy observed that the United States was already entering a period of the missile gap in which "Soviet nuclear striking power and large conventional forces may negate America's deterrent power," and even Vice President Nixon felt compelled to publicly urge more funds for ICBM production.<sup>49</sup>

In point of fact, as the Congressional Joint Committee on Defense Production was to succinctly observe some years later, the missile gap "failed to materialize as expected."<sup>50</sup> Little over one year after the election of John Kennedy, the New York Times ran an "op ed" column by Hanson Baldwin which for all intents and purposes can be called the "obituary" of the missile gap controversy. In Baldwin's words:

The term 'missile gap' was quietly, though unofficially, interred last week. The latest intelligence estimates, compiled by all the services...agree that the United States and the Soviet Union have about the same number of inter-continental ballistic missiles ready for operation and that by year's end, the United States might well have more than Russia.

Thus an "issue," which played a major part in the last Presidential campaign, was finally declared - as many had long claimed - not to be an issue at all.<sup>51</sup>

Having been declared not to be an issue at all," the missile gap subsequently disappeared from the news agenda of the American mass media except for historical references. It also disappeared from the administration's public agenda, and was not mentioned at any Presidential press conference after the second week in November of 1961.<sup>52</sup> Significantly, President Kennedy never specifically repudiated his earlier charges of a Soviet lead in ICBMs, but, as Hanson Baldwin observed, "both he and his administration...carefully refrained from restating them."<sup>53</sup>

It is fitting that the missile gap should have been "closed" not by an official administration pronouncement or through a crash build up of American missile forces, but by means of a newspaper column. While the Soviet ICBM test and the launching of Sputnik I may have solidified the place of the "missile gap" on the media and public agendas in 1957, it had been a newspaper column several years earlier which had first thrust the concept of a "gap" in the race to develop ICBMs onto page one of American newspapers. The "honor" of having been the first to publicly warn of an impending missile gap seems to belong

to columnists Joseph and Stuart Alsop. In early 1954, as Eisenhower's New Look policies were being placed on the public agenda by the President and his Secretary of State, a short news item had appeared in the New York Times quoting an East German report that the Soviet Union had developed a "trans-oceanic guided missile."<sup>54</sup> Shortly thereafter, the Alsop brothers apparently picked up some rumblings from among the Penemunde group of German scientists working on the American missile program, who said that they feared the Russians "may lead the United States in rocket and missile development and research."<sup>55</sup> Neither of these stories generated much publicity by itself, but on May 24, 1954, the Alsops made the prospect of a "missile gap" page one news for the first time, in a column headlined "Hydrogen Rockets Near for War of Continents: Russia Believed Ahead in Work on Ultimate Guided Missiles."<sup>56</sup> The Alsops immediately sensed what such a development would mean to Eisenhower's New Look strategy. Their column argued that:

...the Soviet Union is quite probably ahead of the United States in the immense task of guided missile research, to which the Pentagon has never accorded the highest priority. Thus the question is raised whether the Soviets may not be the first to achieve an intercontinental missile with a hydrogen warhead. If so, the sense of security which this country so curiously draws from weapons of total destruction will prove to be false indeed.... And what will become of the famous American strategic concept of 'massive retaliation' when the thing to be retaliated

against is the total and instantaneous destruction of the United States?<sup>57</sup>

The Alsops' column, and an analysis the following day which warned that "there is very little doubt that the Soviet guided missile effort is more intensive, on a greater scale, and therefore probably ahead of the American effort," generated a brief flurry of Congressional and Department of Defense interest in the subject.<sup>58</sup> The following month, calling the existing Pentagon effort "disorganized," the U.S. Senate ordered Secretary of Defense Charles Wilson to investigate and report back to the Congress by January of 1955.<sup>59</sup> For the next six months, however, the matter appears to have disappeared as a major news story outside of specialized aviation journals. It was not until the Defense Department made its report to the Congress that a comparison of Soviet and American missile programs again found its way back onto page one as a news story.<sup>60</sup>

While the Alsops' early alarms were not sufficient to create a major crisis of confidence over the New Look agenda in the public media, the pattern of events associated with this first warning of a potential missile gap set the stage for virtually all of the subsequent news coverage of the controversy. The initial hints of a Soviet "lead," it should be noted, appeared in the media by way of

reports from the Soviet Union and its allies, and not from domestic sources. These reports were followed by expressions of concern from among those working within the American rocket and missile programs, who believed that the United States was not accordng their efforts as high a priority as might be the case in the Soviet Union. Such concern in turn generated controversy in Washington, where calls for increased defense spending became fodder for partisan debates which were themselves sources of further news stories.

Throughout 1955, it was this last category of sources which lay behind the vast majority of news items relating to the status of the American missile program. Following the January report to the Congress by the Defense Department, the cry which had been launched by the Alsops was taken up by Senator Stuart Symington (D-Missouri), who had earned a reputation as an advocate of a strong U.S. defense posture while serving as the first Secretary of the Air Force under President Truman.<sup>61</sup> In April of 1955, the freshman Senator began his own public campaign to "awaken the country to what the situation is" by charging during a television interview that the Soviet Union was leading the U.S. in ICBM development.<sup>62</sup> By mid-summer, his voice was joined by others from the Senate. Senator Henry M. Jackson urged putting the U.S. ICBM development program on a "crash

basis" in July, and by September Senator Lyndon B. Johnson moved his Armed Services Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee to the first of what were to become numerous hearings on Defense Department production and procurement of missiles and rockets.<sup>63</sup> Even Senator Joseph McCarthy joined in the chorus, claiming in October that "Communists in the government" were to blame for the United States lagging behind the Soviet Union in ICBM development!<sup>64</sup>

At this stage, however, such charges were clearly not representative of the mainstream of defense thinking in the Congress or the country as a whole. As late as November 1956, the Congress was being told that the United States continued to enjoy "a clear superiority over possible aggressors" in the area of atomic forces.<sup>65</sup> As columnist James Reston noted in a retrospective look at this period written shortly after the launching of Sputnik,

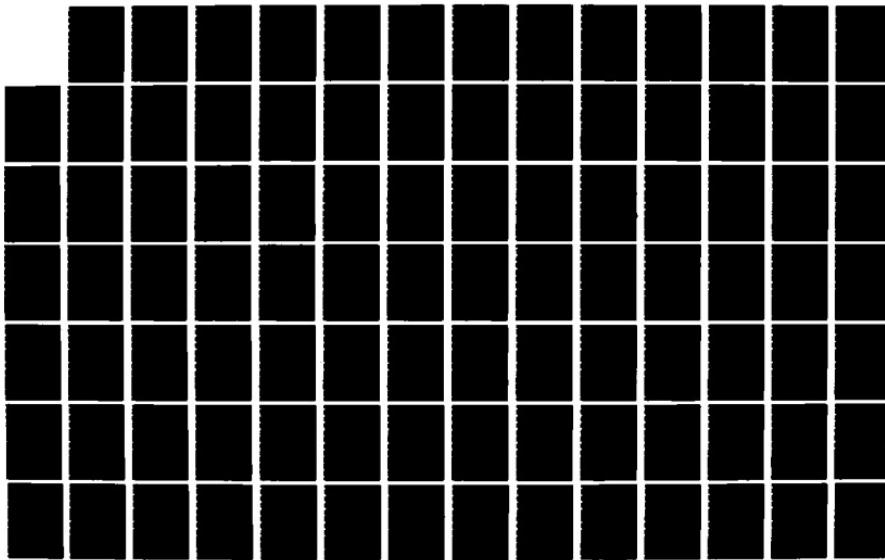
It [was] assumed that Washington could keep ahead of Moscow in the arms race...without interfering too much with the civilian economy.... Moreover, while there were critics of these assumptions...the administration won general consent for them in Congress and the country, and the attitude toward those who questioned these assumptions was that they were ill-informed, alarmist, or both.<sup>66</sup>

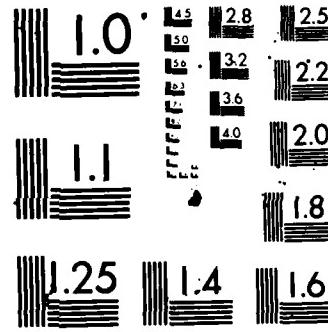
Within the Congress, most members seemed willing to accept the administration position articulated by Secretary of the Air Force Donald Quarles, who in a November

television interview expressed confidence that the United States was leading the Soviet Union in the development of ICBMs.<sup>67</sup> In fact, throughout 1955 and 1956, the administration seemed more willing to support increased efforts in the missile field, and defense in general, than did the Congress. In December of 1955, Eisenhower ordered the Army to give its guided missile program top priority, and within weeks announced that he was substantially increasing the portion of the FY 1957 defense budget devoted to missile development, to a record total of one billion dollars.<sup>68</sup>

Yet so strongly had the New Look's fiscal concepts been embraced by the Congress that, as late as spring of 1957, the President found himself fighting to avoid budget cuts in the missile program. On the 15th of May, 1957, for example, Eisenhower was forced to urge Republican Congressional leaders to resist moves to impose heavy cuts in outlays for missiles in the FY 1958 budget.<sup>69</sup> Nevertheless, one week later the House budget committee approved a \$354 million cutback in appropriations for Air Force missile and aircraft procurement for the following year.<sup>70</sup> Ironically, by the end of the year (after the launching of Sputnik) the President was in the position of having to fight to keep defense spending down while attempting to maintain the same defense and fiscal policies

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for which he had been struggling to acquire funds just months before.

The administration's position in the emerging post-Sputnik debate over defense spending was complicated by the findings of a study of the nation's defense needs which the President had himself commissioned in the spring of 1957. The results of this study were presented to the National Security Council, within weeks after the launching of Sputnik, as a "Top Secret" report formally titled "Deterrence and Survival in the Nuclear Age." The report, more commonly known as the "Gaither Committee Report," represented a major effort to place the concept of a "missile gap" on the agenda of the Eisenhower administration. It warned that:

By 1959, the USSR may be able to launch an attack with ICBMs carrying megaton warheads, against which SAC (the U.S. Strategic Air Command) will be almost completely vulnerable under present programs....The next two years seem to us critical. If we fail to act at once,<sup>71</sup> the risk, in our opinion, will be unacceptable.

The members of the Gaither Committee called upon the Eisenhower administration to increase defense spending and speed the build up of our missile forces in an effort to close what they clearly believed to be a serious "missile gap." Moreover, they recognized that implementing such policies would require the forging of a new consensus to

replace that which had supported the concepts of the New Look. Noting that "the American people have always been ready to shoulder heavy costs for their defense when convinced of the necessity," the Committee's final report urged

...an improved and expanded program for educating the public in current national defense problems, in the belief that the future security of the United States depends heavily upon an informed and supporting public opinion.... Only through such enlightenment and understanding can we avoid the danger of complacency<sup>72</sup> and the enervation of our inherent strengths.

The degree to which the debate which raged for the remainder of the Eisenhower administration contributed to "enlightenment and understanding" is open to serious question, but there can be no doubt that it left little room for complacency. Charges that the fiscal policies of the New Look had allowed America to fall behind the Soviet Union became the focal point for fierce rivalries among the military services, between the administration and the Congress, and between Republicans and Democrats within the Congress. Such rivalries, however, lacking the central direction which had been evident as the New Look consensus had been forged four years earlier, fell far short of constituting the sort of "improved and expanded program for educating the public" called for by the Gaither Committee. As each party to the debate attempted to build its own

"informed and supportive public opinion" in an effort to influence governmental policy, the result was not the forging of a new consensus. Instead, what emerged was a confusing and competing set of claims on the public and media agenda which served merely to undermine the consensus which had existed behind defense policies during Eisenhower's first term.

### Notes for Chapter 5

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  4. Based on an item by item check of all listings in the New York Times Index under the headings of "Missiles" and "Astronautics" from October 1957 through January 1961.
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  7. Eisenhower, Waging Peace: pp. 389-390.
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48. See for example the column by Roscoe Drummond citing CIA estimates to this effect, The New York Herald Tribune; 25 January 1960: p. 13; and "US Intelligence Estimates See USSR With 150 ICBMs Operational in '61: At least 3:1 Superiority," NYT; 2 February 1960: p. 1.
49. NYT; 27 October 1960: p. 15; and 5 November 1960: p. 14.
50. United States Congress, Joint Committee on Defense Production print: Deterrence and Survival in the Nuclear Age (The "Gaither Report" of 1957); (hereafter cited as Gaither Committee Report), 94th Congress, 2d Session; USGPO, Washington D.C.; 1976: "Forward," p. 1.
51. Baldwin, Hanson W. "New Figures Close 'Missile Gap,'" in NYT, 26 November 1961: Section E, p. 4.
52. Chase, Harold W., and Allen H. Lerman (eds.). Kennedy and the Press; Thomas Y. Crowell Company, N.Y.; 1965: p. 125.
53. NYT, 26 November 1961: Section E, p. 4.
54. NYT; 8 January 1954: p. 2.
55. NYT; 5 May 1954: p. 18.
56. The New York Herald Tribune, 24 May 1954: p. 1.
57. Ibid.
58. Joseph and Stuart Alsop. "Pentagon Studies All-out Guided Missile Program," in the N.Y. Herald Tribune; 25 May 1954: p. 1.
59. NYT, 13 June 1954: p. 52.
60. "Secretary Talbott Sees Need to Outstrip USSR in Intercontinental H-Missiles," NYT, 28 January 1955: p. 1.
61. Aliano, op cit.: p. 212.
62. Reported in the NYT, 23 April 1955: p. 8.
63. NYT; 17 July 1955, p. 29; and 13 September 1955, p.

1.

64. NYT, 31 October 1955: p. 15.

65. U.S. House of Representatives. United States Defense Policies Since WW II; House Document 100; 85th Cong., 1st Session.; prepared by Charles H. Donnelly, Senior Specialist in National Defense, Library of Congress Legislative Reference Service; USGPO, Washington D.C.; Nov. 1956: pp. 42-43.

66. Reston, James. "The U.S. and Science," in the NYT; 6 November 1957: p. 12.

67. Reported in the NYT, 7 November 1955: p. 13.

68. NYT; 7 December 1955: p. 1; and 21 December 1955: p. 1.

69. NYT; 15 May 1957: p. 1.

70. NYT; 22 May 1957: p. 13.

71. Gaither Committee Report, op. cit.: p. 25.

72. Ibid. pp. 23-24.

## 6. Efforts to Set the Agenda

The frustrations of trying to forge a new consensus on national defense during the debate over the "missile gap" were nowhere more evident than in the efforts of the Gaither Committee itself. The Committee members' observation that "the future security of the United States depends on an informed and supportive public opinion" is a clear indication of the weight which they placed on the need to shape the public agenda in such a way as to build such a consensus. They also recognized that this would not be an easy task. Dr. James P. Baxter III of Williams College, a member of the Gaither Committee whose prior experience in such matters included having served as a member of the Committee on the Present Danger during the campaign to "sell" NSC-68, felt that it would be necessary to "learn something from the advertising profession" in order to "get the thing sold and keep it sold."<sup>1</sup> His concern, and that of other members of the Committee, was apparently driven by the belief that:

Democracies have never been at their best in relating force and policy. The normal pattern in the United States has been to let our armaments run down in a long period of peace, to fail to discern the impending danger in time, and to prepare too little and too late. Our unreadiness

could be measured not only in terms of material and trained manpower, but in ways of thinking which are highly dangerous in wartime. Unpreparedness was woven through the whole texture of our national life.<sup>2</sup>

The statement demanded by the situation thus described would obviously have to be a strong one if the Committee's recommendations were to be "sold." It is not surprising, therefore, to find Senator William Proxmire, in the introduction to the Congressional release of the Committee's findings in 1976, comparing the Committee's efforts to those of the State-Defense policy committee which drafted NSC-68 in 1950, and observing that "[f]ew documents have had as great an influence on American strategic thinking in the modern era as the Gaither Committee Report of 1957."<sup>3</sup> And yet, unlike NSC-68, the recommendations of the Gaither Committee were never endorsed or implemented by the Administration.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, one study of the Committee and its report found that the Committee's proposals "fail[ed] to gain the support of a single department."<sup>5</sup> Both the Committee's warning of an impending "missile gap" and its recommendations for a crash program to close it were ultimately rejected by the President who had initially commissioned the study. Clearly, the Gaither Committee Report was not as effective a "bludgeon" as NSC-68 had been!

The Gaither Committee itself was an outgrowth of an

earlier study by the Federal Civilian Defense Administration (FCDA). In the spring of 1957, the FCDA had submitted a proposal to the President and the National Security Council which recommended a federal investment of some \$40 billion in the construction of shelters to protect the population from the blast effects of nuclear weapons.<sup>6</sup> Such an expenditure, equal to slightly more than the entire defense budget at that time, was seen by Eisenhower as far too costly to adopt. At the same time, however, both he and the National Security Council recognized that the threat postulated in the FCDA report was too serious to be rejected out of hand.<sup>7</sup>

A consensus emerged during the National Security Council meeting that if the administration was going to contemplate spending such sums on protecting the population from enemy attack, all possible means of defense should be considered (instead of just looking at blast shelters). Given the existing state of competition among the armed services for defense allocations, the Council agreed that a study done by experts drawn from within government ranks would probably result in a compromise report which merely recommended a division of funds among existing programs. As a result, on April 4, 1957, the President, acting on the advice of Robert Cutler, his Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, directed his Science Advisory Committee

to recruit a panel of private citizens to conduct the study.<sup>8</sup> As the President described it, this group, which was officially called the "Security Resources Panel of the Office of Defense Mobilization Science Advisory Committee," was created

...to bring new minds and background experience to bear on major problems.... It was empowered to receive information from government agencies and departments and come up with an independent appraisal. With no vested interest in a particular department, and no federal jobs to protect, the panel was a means of obtaining independent judgments.

According to Paul Nitze, who served as an advisor to the Gaither Committee, it was precisely this lack of "vested interests" which ultimately caused the Committee's recommendations to suffer in comparison with NSC-68. Nitze believed that the Committee members were "too far removed from executive branch responsibility to be fully effective." As a result, he said, the panel was "out of touch" with the problems its report would present to the Eisenhower administration, and subsequently found itself "in a poor position to help fight its recommendations through the decision stage."<sup>10</sup> This viewpoint is endorsed by Robert H. Johnson, who, based upon his association with the Gaither Committee as a member of the National Security Council staff, recalls that the report did not adequately "reflect the views of important Administration members."<sup>11</sup>

This failure was clearly not a result of any lack of prestige or technical expertise on the part of the members of the panel. H. Rowan Gaither, chairman of the boards of both the Ford Foundation and the RAND Corporation, was asked to chair the Committee, and Robert C. Sprague, chairman of the board of Sprague Electric Company and a consultant to the earlier Killian Committee (which had also looked at national defense issues), was named as co-director.<sup>12</sup> They in turn recruited ten additional panel members with backgrounds which qualified them as experts in various aspects of management, defense, and the social sciences. The full panel included, in addition to Gaither and Sprague: William C. Foster (Olin-Mathieson Chemicals); Dr. James P. Baxter III (Williams College); Dr. Robert D. Calkins (Brookings Institution); John J. Corson (McKinsey and Co.); Dr. James A. Perkins (Carnegie Corporation); Dr. Robert C. Prim (Bell Labs); Dr. Hector R. Skifter (Airborne Instruments Labs); William Webster (New England Electric); Professor Jerome B. Wiesner (MIT); and, as technical advisor, Edward P. Oliver (RAND).<sup>13</sup> Subsequently, an advisory group was appointed which included, among others, Robert Lovett, who had served in a similar advisory capacity during the drafting of NSC-68, and (as mentioned earlier) Paul Nitze, who had been director of the State Department's Policy Planning Staff during the drafting of

NSC-68.<sup>14</sup> By late summer, over ninety individuals were involved in the Gaither Committee's project.<sup>15</sup>

The Committee first met secretly in May, when it began mapping out an approach to the task it had been assigned by the President and the National Security Council. As spelled out in NSC Action 1691, that task was originally to "study and form a broad brush opinion of the relative value of various active and passive measures to protect the civil population in case of nuclear attack and its aftermath, taking into account probable new weapons systems; and to suggest which of the various active and passive measures are likely to be most effective, in relation to their costs."<sup>16</sup> By the time the Committee reconvened in August of 1957, its members had become convinced that the most effective means of protecting the population was not to be found in either active or passive defenses, but in "the deterrent value of our retaliatory forces."<sup>17</sup> As a result, the scope of the committee's inquiry was expanded to include an assessment of the nation's overall deterrent posture, and the nature of the Soviet threat which it was designed to deter. It was this aspect of the Committee's final report which was subsequently credited by one assessment with being the first effort to warn the administration of the "danger of a 'missile gap.'"<sup>18</sup>

The Committee's assessment of this threat was shaped in part by the fact that several members of the panel were given access "to particularly sensitive studies and Intelligence information."<sup>19</sup> What they found in those studies clearly alarmed them. As one member of the panel, Dr. James Perkins, Vice-President of the Carnegie Corporation, put it in testimony to the Senate Committee on Government Operations, "it seemed to us quite clear that the nature of the threat was not fully realized, or at least the threat as we discovered it on briefings from the Pentagon and the Central Intelligence Agency.... I think that is eminently clear from the country's reaction once Sputnik went up."<sup>20</sup> It was, in fact, not just "the country's reaction" about which they were concerned: it was what many of them saw as the complacency of the Eisenhower administration and its New Look fiscal restraints on defense spending which caused the most alarm.<sup>21</sup>

Throughout the fall of 1957, the Committee rushed to complete its studies and present its findings to the President. Its members became convinced that "the evidence clearly indicates an increasing threat which may become critical in 1959 or early 1960."<sup>22</sup> Based upon the intelligence assessments made available to them, their conclusion was that:

The Soviet military threat lies not only in

their present military capabilities - formidable as they are - but also in the dynamic development and exploitation of their military technology.... The singleness of purpose with which they have pressed their military-centered industrial development has led to spectacular progress.... They created from scratch a long range air force...re-equipped it with jet aircraft...<sup>23</sup> and probably surpassed us in ICBM development.

The threat described by the Committee's report in turn drove a somber assessment of the capability of the American defense establishment to meet the Soviet challenge. When, on November 7th, 1957, the Committee presented its findings to "one of the largest NSC meetings in history," it warned that "defense programs now in being and programmed for the future will not give adequate assurance of protection.... The protection of the United States and its population rests, therefore, primarily on the deterrence provided by SAC (the Strategic Air Command)."<sup>24</sup> However, the Committee continued ominously, "the current vulnerability of SAC to surprise attack...and the threat posed to SAC by the prospects of an early Russian ICBM capability, call for prompt remedial action."<sup>25</sup>

Rather than the study of "the relative value of various active and passive measures to protect the civil population" which the President had directed, the program of "remedial action" which the Committee urged the administration to adopt involved a wide range of defense

improvements. The total program required an increase in defense outlays of approximately \$44 billion over a five year period. The Committee recommended an immediate increase of between \$2.87 billion to \$4.8 billion over the \$38 billion then being contemplated for defense spending in 1959, with an eventual increase to a level of just under \$50 billion a year by 1961.<sup>26</sup> While a portion of this increase was to go toward the construction of fallout shelters, the bulk of the effort was to be devoted to increasing the retaliatory striking power available to American strategic deterrent forces. Central to this effort were proposals to improve the alert posture of SAC, enhance early warning radar capabilities, accelerate the Polaris submarine launched ballistic missile system program, and to make "every effort...to have a significant number...of ICBMs operational...by late 1959," by increasing the number of Atlas and Titan missiles scheduled for procurement from 80 to 600.<sup>27</sup>

The members of the Gaither Committee and its advisory panel spent several hours presenting their arguments to the President and virtually all of the top defense officials in the administration.<sup>28</sup> They saw themselves as essentially confronting two major tasks. Robert Lovett, assisted by several members of the advisory panel, attacked the problem of the program's cost, arguing that "the American economy

could afford to pay for the vitally needed measures outlined in the report," and that, of equal importance, "the people as a whole and the business community in particular would support the President if he urged increased spending for defense."<sup>29</sup> Robert Sprague, who had taken over leadership of the Committee after Gaither had been forced to step down for reasons of health in September, led the effort to convince the President that "the Nation faces a clear and imminent threat to its survival, but we have not yet awakened to this very unpleasant fact."<sup>30</sup> Behind the arguments of both Lovett and Sprague stood the Committee's conviction that, if they could get the President to publicly endorse their findings, the country could be "awakened" in time to meet the "threat to its survival."

The President, however, remained unconvinced. Neither the National Security Council briefings nor a series of earlier private meetings with the most prominent members of the Committee were able to obtain Eisenhower's unqualified support of the Committee's assessment of the threat or its recommendations.<sup>31</sup> The President, remaining consistent with the philosophy which had fostered the policies of the "New Look," expressed "a nagging fear that the American people would balk at paying the bill."<sup>32</sup> As Eisenhower recalled it, he felt compelled to remind the panel that Congress had

just seen fit to reduce his own defense budget recommendations by \$1.5 billion.<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, the economic aspects of the Committee's report do not appear to have been the primary factor behind the President's reluctance to publicly endorse it.

The crucial element in the inability of the Gaither Committee members to win Eisenhower's support for their recommendations seems to have been the President's rejection of their projection of the Soviet threat over the next several years. In Eisenhower's own words:

I did not agree with all of the panel's hypothetical figures; moreover, the panel had failed to take into account certain vital information and other considerations.... The reactions of the members of the National Security Council were roughly the same as my own: the Gaither Report contained certain useful distillations of data and some interesting suggestions, but the entire report could not be accepted as a master blueprint for action.<sup>34</sup>

One of the most crucial pieces of "vital information" which the Gaither Committee appears not to have been able to take into account was the availability of photographic evidence concerning the status of Soviet missile production facilities. Since 1956, the CIA had been using U-2 reconnaissance aircraft to overfly the Soviet Union for intelligence gathering purposes.<sup>35</sup> Yet one of the complaints of the Gaither panel was a supposed lack of "hard intelligence" concerning Soviet military

capabilities. The Committee report observed that "we have too few solid facts on which to base essential knowledge of USSR capabilities and too few solid facts to learn how they are changing with time."<sup>36</sup> Thus, despite the fact that several committee members were granted access to CIA and military intelligence assessments, it does not appear that knowledge of the U-2 program or the intelligence it was gathering was made available to them. The result, as one reporter involved in the subsequent leaking of the Gaither Committee Report to the press later came to realize, was that "the Gaither Committee...relied on what turned out to be incomplete government intelligence from which they...extrapolated the threat beyond actuality."<sup>37</sup> It was primarily for this reason that the Eisenhower administration was reluctant to accept the "threat" which was of such great concern to the panel members.

It is possible that the revelation of the available U-2 data would have brought the "missile gap" to a close several years prior to its actual demise. However, Eisenhower believed that the intelligence and foreign policy costs of making such a revelation would be too great to warrant publicizing the U-2 program. As a result, he specifically rejected a suggestion by John Foster Dulles that he disclose the existence of the U-2 program at this time.<sup>38</sup> Noting the President's responsibility to "always

strive to see the totality of the national and international situation," he "reluctantly" concluded that he must withhold that information.<sup>39</sup> Such a decision could not have been an easy one, for the revelation of the U-2 data would also have gone a long way toward assisting the President in his campaign to reassure the American public of the soundness of the New Look's defense policies in the aftermath of Sputnik. The President clearly recognized this cost to what he described as an effort to make a "strong case for confidence and sane direction," observing that he was "hampered, of course, by the fact that I could not reveal secrets which in themselves would have reassured our people."<sup>40</sup>

In the President's view, it was the need for such reassurance, and not the alarm sounded by the Gaither Committee, which was called for following the Soviet successes in space. These views had been reinforced by the reaction he observed in the press one week prior to the Gaither Committee's report, when the Soviet Union launched its second Sputnik, this time with a dog aboard.<sup>41</sup> As Eisenhower described it,

It was a period of anxiety. Sputnik had revealed the psychological vulnerability of our people. The Communists were steadily fomenting trouble and rattling sabers; our economy was sputtering somewhat, and the ceaseless and usually healthy self-criticism in which we of the United States indulge had brought a measure of

genuine self-doubt. Added to these and other factors...[were] the alleged missile "gaps" which political observers claimed they had detected. There was ample stimulus for public uncertainty.

The Soviet satellites were a genuine technological triumph, but this was exceeded by their propaganda value. To uninformed peoples in the world, Soviet successes in one area led to the belief that Soviet Communism was surging ahead in all types of activity.... Their most harmful effects were to cause people who had manifold reasons to be proud to be temporarily fearful, and to add fuel to the fire of demand for larger<sup>42</sup> appropriations as the answer to everything.

It was precisely to counter such fears that the President went before the country on national television within hours after having received the Gaither Report. In the first of what was to have been a series of three speeches on science and national security, the President took direct aim at those who charged, as Senator John F. Kennedy had just two days earlier, that "the nation was losing the satellite-missile race with the Soviet Union because of...complacent miscalculations, penny-pinching, budget cutbacks, incredibly confused mismanagement, and wasteful rivalries and jealousies."<sup>43</sup> The President acknowledged that "we need to feel a sense of urgency," but cautioned that "this does not mean that we should mount our charger and try to ride off in all directions at once."<sup>44</sup> Despite the alarms sounded earlier that same day during the National Security Council's briefing by the Gaither Committee, President Eisenhower went on to emphasize that

"[i]t is my conviction, supported by trusted scientific and military advisors, that, although the Soviets are quite likely ahead in some missile and special areas, and are obviously ahead of us in satellite development, as of today the over-all military strength of the Free World is distinctly greater than that of the Communist countries."<sup>45</sup> As a result, he argued, "it misses the whole point to say that we must now increase our expenditures on all kinds of military hardware and defense.... We can have a sound defense, and the sound economy on which it rests, if we set our priorities and stick to them, and if each one of us is ready to carry his own share of the burden willingly and without complaint."<sup>46</sup>

Eisenhower's speech was not a rejection of the entire concept of an increase in defense spending, and he did call for an application of national resources "as fully as the need demands." But neither was this the sort of endorsement the Gaither Committee members had hoped for when they presented their report to the President earlier in the day. It was, in fact, a reaffirmation of the basic fiscal responsibility themes already associated with the New Look. The knowledge that the President had been aware of the Committee's conclusions for several days prior to the formal NSC presentation, and thus would have had time to incorporate its themes into his speech if he had so

desired, must have been particularly frustrating to the Committee's leaders.<sup>47</sup> Robert Sprague, who had personally presented those conclusions to Eisenhower, undoubtedly voiced the concern of many other members of the Committee when he subsequently observed that "I do not believe that the concern I personally feel has as yet been expressed by the President to the American public."<sup>48</sup>

The following week, when the President delivered the second of his speeches on national security to an audience in Oklahoma City, he did incorporate some of the proposals of the Gaither Committee in his recommendations to insure our "future security."<sup>49</sup> Specifically, he echoed their call for enhancing the SAC alert posture and dispersal procedures, and also urged a speedup in the nation's missile program, although he stopped short of calling for any sort of a "crash program" to build up those forces.<sup>50</sup> Moreover, while he continued to stress the need for fiscal responsibility in defense planning, he did seem to open the door for an increased defense budget in coming years, observing that America's military forces "for the conditions existing today...are both efficient and adequate. But if they are to remain so for the future, their design and power must keep pace with the increasing capabilities that science gives both to the aggressor and the defender." As a result, he concluded, "by whatever

amount savings fail to equal the additional costs of security, our total expenditures will go up. Our people will rightly demand it. They will not sacrifice security to worship a balanced budget."<sup>51</sup>

A number of subsequent analyses of Eisenhower's Oklahoma City speech have professed to see in it a marked shift in the President's position on defense, and have attributed that shift to the short term impact of the Gaither Committee.<sup>52</sup> While the inclusion of several of the Committee's recommendations does indicate that the report obviously was a factor in the wording of the speech, it is difficult to substantiate a major shift in Eisenhower's defense concepts by the available evidence in the text. Nothing the President said was in conflict with his New Look philosophy, and in many respects the tone of the speech was almost identical to his earlier efforts to persuade the Congress not to cut his defense budget proposals. Perhaps the proposed third speech in the series on national defense would have shed some additional light on this issue, but on November 25th, 1957, Eisenhower suffered a mild stroke, and the speech was never delivered.<sup>53</sup> The fact that he refers to this unfinished speech in his memoirs as a "confidence speech," however, would tend to indicate that, like the two which the President had already delivered, it was not going to be a

reflection of the alarm which the Gaither Committee wished the President to sound.

Ultimately, the President decided to use the recommendations of the Gaither Committee as the basis for further study within the administration, without making either its threat assessment or its specific proposals public. Eisenhower recalls instructing his cabinet to "study [the Gaither Committee Report] earnestly, taking up proposals one by one, and decide whether to accept, modify, or reject them." As for his public endorsement of the Committee's findings, however, he limited himself to the position that "[w]e must get people to understand that we confront a tough problem...but one that we can lick."<sup>54</sup> He was opposed to suggestions from some of the members of the Committee that he allow them to make their findings public, observing that "I could see no national advantage in broadcasting the opinions and suppositions in the report with the attendant risks to security."<sup>55</sup> Nevertheless, his overall evaluation of the Committee's efforts was that "[i]n the final result the Gaither Report was useful," because he believed that "it acted as a gadfly on any in the administration given to complacency."<sup>56</sup>

Ironically, it was the President's refusal to release the details of the Gaither Report, coupled with his efforts to

reassure the public in the weeks following Sputnik, which led a number of the most prominent members of the Committee to the conclusion that it was his own complacency which was most in need of being shaken.<sup>57</sup> Within days after the President began his public campaign to rebuild the confidence of the American people concerning national defense, several members of the now officially disbanded Gaither Committee began to consider additional means by which they might be able to influence the President.<sup>58</sup> Led by William C. Foster, who had been named co-director of the Committee with Sprague after Gaither stepped down, this group saw as its primary goal the "stiffening" of the President "in the form of steady heartening to exert his leadership."<sup>59</sup> They also discussed ways in which they might be able to take direct measures themselves to "arouse the American public and elite groups to the dangers facing the country."<sup>60</sup>

The efforts of this informal group culminated in a dinner meeting with Vice-President Richard Nixon at Foster's home in Washington D.C. on December 9th. Joining Foster and the Vice President were, among others: Dr. Frank Stanton, another Gaither Committee member and the head of CBS; Paul Nitze; John Cowles, the publisher of the Cowles Newspaper Group; pollster Elmo Roper; and Laurance S. Rockefeller, president of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund (which

subsequently published its own study of international security in the form of a report which came to conclusions virtually identical with those of the Gaither Committee).<sup>61</sup> According to at least one news report published after the meeting, President Eisenhower was aware of and approved of the Vice-President's attendance at the dinner, which must have provided some encouragement to the members of the group.<sup>62</sup>

Although Foster described the meeting as "purely a social occasion and an informal dinner," the focal point of the evening was a consideration of "the problem of alerting the public to the defense and economic threat posed by the Soviet Union."<sup>63</sup> Foster himself appears to have made two formal proposals to the group. First, he urged that those present work to obtain the publication of a "sanitized" version of the Top Secret Gaither Committee Report, with the classified portions omitted or rewritten. This would be necessary to support the second of his proposals, which was the formation of a committee "which would seek to convince the American people of the need for greater sacrifices in light of the grave Soviet threat."<sup>64</sup>

Such a committee would have been an almost direct copy of the Committee on the Present Danger which had been formed to build public support behind the proposals of NSC-68.

News accounts of the dinner meeting in fact used language which almost exactly paralleled that used in describing the formation of the Committee on the Present Danger, referring to the gathering as a discussion by "a nonpartisan group of leading Americans" who sought "to mobilize America behind the new defense and other programs need[ed] to counter the danger from Russia."<sup>65</sup> Other accounts referred to the group as "a new committee on today's danger," whose task would be "encouraging and helping 'opinion leaders' all over the country to keep ringing the alarm bell and explaining the necessity to face up to the defense job with money and possible sacrifice of civilian comforts."<sup>66</sup>

Unlike the original Committee on the Present Danger, however, Foster's group lacked the unqualified support of the President and top administration officials.<sup>67</sup> Without this support, the members of the group which gathered at Foster's house, along with several other members of the Gaither Committee itself, were of the opinion that "no group, whatever its composition, could reach the public."<sup>68</sup> Robert Sprague perhaps best expressed this view, noting in testimony before the Senate that although he had personally given between 30-40 speeches a year to try and sound the alarm, it was his conviction that:

a citizen like myself, or a group of citizens,  
can do very little.... I think there is one man  
in the United States that can do this

effectively, and that is the President. I do not think there is anybody else.<sup>69</sup>

For a brief moment, it appeared as if the necessary Presidential support might be forthcoming. According to the New York Times in an article published just three days after the meeting at Foster's house, the President was prepared to "back" the "alert advocates." The article reported that "President Eisenhower has encouraged a group of leading Americans who feel that the country requires a special abrupt and continuous alarm bell on the danger from the Soviet Union."<sup>70</sup> Such encouragement fell somewhat short of the leadership which the group had hoped for, however. Moreover, the President adamantly refused to consider releasing any version of the Gaither Committee Report (not surprisingly, given his objections to its threat assessments). Lacking Presidential willingness to put the prestige of the White House behind their claims of a vastly increased and dangerous Soviet menace, the proposed committee was not heard from again!

The absence of a committee composed of "a nonpartisan group of leading Americans" dedicated to sounding an "alarm bell on the danger from the Soviet Union" did not, however, mean that such an alarm would not be sounded. The members of Foster's group were not the only ones calling for the release of the Gaither Committee findings. By the time of

their meeting with Nixon, the once secret report was already being discussed in the press, and Democratic leaders in the House and Senate were demanding access to it as part of their newly launched investigations of the supposed American lag behind Soviet missile and space technology.

Leading the congressional charge was Senator Lyndon Johnson, who had been one of the earliest among those who had warned of the danger of an impending missile gap. Following the launching of the second Soviet satellite, Johnson publicly demanded a full briefing for his Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee from the Pentagon on the status of the American missile program. On November 4th, Johnson and several other ranking members of the Congress were given a seven and one half hour briefing by Department of Defense officials, after which Johnson immediately called a press conference and spoke with newsmen for nearly a full hour.<sup>71</sup> As the Senator from Texas later put it, "the facts which were brought before us during that briefing gave us no comfort."<sup>72</sup> Johnson made headlines the following day by announcing that his subcommittee would conduct a "full, complete, and exhaustive inquiry into the state of our defenses and the steps that would have to be taken."<sup>73</sup> He left no doubt as to what he believed the inquiry would find, however,

asserting in his press conference that "the Russians are ahead of us. Period!"<sup>74</sup> Acting on these beliefs, Johnson subsequently opened his subcommittee investigation by observing that "it is not necessary to hold these hearings to determine that we have lost an important battle in technology. That has been demonstrated by the satellites that are whistling above our heads."<sup>75</sup>

The Senator challenged the President's views that what this situation demanded was public reassurance of America's strength. Like the members of the Gaither Committee, Senator Johnson voiced his concern that he "felt a sense of urgency in the present situation and...had not found this feeling in Defense Officials."<sup>76</sup> In his view, the Russians had "handed us both a technological defeat and a propaganda defeat. The times call for bold leadership by strong men, and a feeble denial of the facts of life will not strengthen us."<sup>77</sup> The stated goal of his hearings, therefore, was to produce a public record of those facts and thus provide "a clear definition of the threat to our security, perhaps the greatest that our country has ever known."<sup>78</sup> Again, much like the members of the Gaither Committee, he saw a need to sound a public alarm. "The facts that I have learned," he stated, "so far give me no cause for comfort, [but] I do not feel that they must be withheld from the public.... I do not believe the facts

will invite our people either to a siesta or to a hysteria. I believe the facts will inspire Americans to the greatest effort in American history."<sup>79</sup>

Given these beliefs, it was only natural that once the existence of the Gaither Committee Report became known, Senator Johnson and his subcommittee would join those seeking to obtain its release. Although the Committee had operated in almost total secrecy prior to making its presentation to the President and the NSC, it did not take long after that meeting for leaks to begin circulating in the press. The only reference to the Gaither Committee's work which appeared in the mass media before November was in a column by Stewart Alsop published on the 26th of August, in which Mr. Alsop observed that "President Eisenhower has called the head of the Ford Foundation, H. Rowan Gaither Jr., to Washington to...study the possibility of employing new technological means of defense against atomic attack."<sup>80</sup> Alsop used the occasion to renew his charges that "the present American air defense is totally inadequate to prevent a devastating attack by the growing Soviet air and missile forces," a condition which he considered to be a direct "result of the budget-dictated 'more bang for a buck' doctrine."<sup>81</sup> He did not, however, follow up on the progress of the Committee in subsequent columns, and there was no further news coverage of the

Committee until after it had completed its work.

In his memoirs, President Eisenhower recalls concluding the NSC meeting at which the Gaither Report was presented by remarking that "It will be interesting to find out how long it can be kept secret."<sup>82</sup> He did not have to wait long to find out. Given the size of the NSC meeting, it is not surprising that the fact of the gathering was reported in the next day's papers.<sup>83</sup> The following day, the substance of the report began to be hinted at in a New York Times article headlined "US In Secret Study of Defense Policies," which observed that "a panel of prominent persons not in the government is concluding an unusually secret defense study for the Administration. The study is so secret that no one will admit publicly its existence."<sup>84</sup> Despite the secrecy, the article was able to accurately report that "the original scope of their inquiry was civil defense. However, there have been indications that the group was subsequently assigned to broader fields."<sup>85</sup>

The details about those "broader fields" began appearing in the press by the end of the month. On November 23rd, the New York Herald Tribune ran as its lead article a report which proclaimed: "Soviets Could Launch Missile Attack by '60, U.S. Report Indicates: Says S.A.C. Could Be Neutralized."<sup>86</sup> Citing only "reliable informants" as his

sources, reporter Tom Lambert presented a reasonably accurate rendition of the portion of the Gaither Report dealing with the nature of the Soviet threat. Referring to the Gaither Report as "tightly held" and "foreboding," Lambert also accurately reflected the Committee's views that "the United States must hasten its defense efforts or face possible neutralization...through Soviet missiles."<sup>87</sup> Over the next few weeks, more and more information about the details of the report found its way into the mass media, eventually prompting Newsweek to run an article in its "National Security" section describing the process as a "Leak - And Then a Flood!"<sup>88</sup>

The "flood" to which the Newsweek article referred came in the form of a page one article by Chalmers Roberts in the Washington Post of December 20th, 1957. Under a banner headline which proclaimed "Secret Report Sees United States in Grave Peril - Enormous Arms Outlay Is Held Vital to Survival," Roberts provided a 3000 word account of virtually all of the Gaither Committee's findings and the history of the Committee's deliberations as well.<sup>89</sup> Although Roberts had not had access to an actual copy of the Committee's final report, he was able to put together his account on the basis of interviews with some twenty individuals who were either involved in drafting the document or who had been briefed on its findings.<sup>90</sup>

According to a later account by Roberts, he was granted these interviews because "a number of Gaither Panel members...were willing, in the wake of Sputnik, to disclose the sense of the document because they feared for their country."<sup>91</sup>

These fears were obviously strong enough that, once it became evident that the Eisenhower administration was not going to accept the recommendations of the Gaither Report, many of the committee members felt it to be their duty to alert the country by by-passing the administration and taking their case directly to the public by leaking the report to the news media. In this manner, they hoped to be able to bring sufficient public pressure to bear upon the President to compel him to respond to the threat as they saw it. Significantly, Roberts found that virtually all of his sources on the Committee became available to him in the ten days immediately following the 9 December gathering at William Foster's home.

The Chalmers Roberts article reflected almost precisely the concerns which had been expressed at that meeting. He described the situation which the report projected for America as being one of "cataclysmic peril," with the nation "moving in frightening course to the status of a second-class power." Overall, he observed that "the report

strips away the complacency and lays bare the highly unpleasant realities in what is the first across-the-board survey of the relative postures of the United States and the Free World and of the Soviet Union and the Communist orbit." Even so, he noted, the mere existence of such a report might not be enough to move the country to action, since "even after the committee had reached the point of unanimous agreement...the atmosphere was not conducive to their ideas." As a result, Roberts, like those who had earlier gathered at Foster's house, concluded that "what the ultimate effect of the Gaither report will be will depend first on the President and then on the Congress and the public."<sup>92</sup>

The Congress, at least, was quick to respond. Within twenty four hours after the publication of the Chalmers Roberts article, the New York Times reported that "several Democratic Senators called on President Eisenhower...to make the report available to key Congressional committees." Moreover, according to the report, at least some of the Senators threatened that "if the report was not published its authors might be called before the Senate Preparedness subcommittee..investigating the United States missile program."<sup>93</sup> Editorial commentary joined in the chorus calling for release of the report, with the New York Times urging the White House to "put an end to this

alarming and undignified game" in which "details or alleged details have been oozing out in a slow process of leakage compounded by rumor."<sup>94</sup> By this point, the amount of publicity surrounding the Gaither Report had caused even Vice President Nixon to suggest to the President that "Most of the recommendations are already in the papers anyway. Making the document public should give us no great problem."<sup>95</sup>

Eisenhower, backed by Gaither himself, steadfastly resisted such efforts to procure the public release of the Gaither Committee Report.<sup>96</sup> In late January of 1958, the President formally declined the demands of Lyndon Johnson's Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee that they be allowed access to the report, contending that "throughout our history the President has withheld confidential advisory opinions and information whenever he found that its disclosure would be inimical to the nation's security."<sup>97</sup> The report was not provided to the Congress. Congress, however, had its own response. On January 23rd, observing that "this morning we have learned from the newspapers that the Gaither Report will not be made available to either the Preparedness Subcommittee or to the people of the United States of America," Senator Joseph Clark (D-Pa.) entered into the Congressional record the entire text of the article by Chalmers Roberts. "The

importance of this article," Senator Clark emphasized, "arises from the fact that it is well known by many Members of this body, including myself, that this newspaper account accurately and clearly states the major findings and conclusions of the Gaither report."<sup>98</sup> It was this news account which stood as the "official" Congressional and public account of the Gaither Committee Report until its declassification nearly fifteen years later.

### Notes for Chapter 6

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1. United States Senate, Subcommittee on National Policy Machinery of the Committee on Government Operations. Organizing for National Security; Hearings, 23 February 1960 - 4 September 1961; USGPO, Washington D.C.; 1961: Volume I, p. 85.
  2. Ibid.: p. 77.
  3. Gaither Committee Report; "Letter of Transmittal," April 9, 1976: p. iii.
  4. Ibid. Forward: p. 2.
  5. Halperin, Morton H. "The Gaither Committee and the Policy Process," in World Politics: A Quarterly Journal of International Relations; Vol. XIII, No. 3 (April 1961): p. 371.
  6. Roberts, Chalmers. "Secret Report Sees United States in Grave Peril," The Washington Post; 20 December, 1957: Reprinted in full in The Congressional Record, 85th Congress, 2nd Session; Vol. 104, Part I (23 January 1958): pp. 858-859.
  7. Halperin: p. 361.
  8. Ibid.: pp. 362-363; and Gaither Report: p. 9.
  9. Eisenhower, Waging Peace: p. 220.
  10. Nitze, Paul H. "Organizing for National Policy Planning in the United States," in U.S. Senate, Organizing for National Security; Volume 2: Studies and Background Materials submitted to the Committee on Government Operations; 86th & 87th Congress; USGPO, Washington D.C.; 1961: p. 286.
  11. Johnson, Robert H. "Periods of Peril." Foreign Affairs; Vol. 61, No. 4 (Spring 1983): pp. 950, 966.

12. Halperin: p. 362; Gaither Report: p. 42; U.S. Senate, Organizing for National Security: p. 48.
13. Gaither Report: p. 42.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid.: pp. 9, 43-45.
16. In Gaither Report: p. 12.
17. Halperin: p. 363; Gaither Report: p. 12, 16.
18. Gaither Report: "Foreword," p. 1.
19. Ibid.: p. 10.
20. U.S. Senate, Organizing for National Security: p. 293-294.
21. Halperin: p. 364.
22. Gaither Report: p. 12.
23. Ibid.: p. 15.
24. Halperin: p. 364; and Gaither Report: p. 16.
25. Gaither Report: p. 16.
26. Ibid.: pp. 22-23.
27. Ibid.: p. 17-18.
28. Halperin: p. 369.
29. Ibid.: p. 368; and Roberts (in Congressional Record): p. 858.
30. U.S. Senate, Organizing for National Security: p. 55.
31. Halperin: p. 369.
32. Roberts, op. cit.: p. 858.
33. Eisenhower, Waging Peace: p. 222.
34. Ibid.: p. 221.
35. Bottome: p. 81, note 56.

36. Gaither Report: p. 21.
37. Roberts, Chalmers M. The Washington Post: The First 100 Years; Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston; 1977: p. 335.
38. Eisenhower, Waging Peace: p. 225.
39. Ibid.: pp. 221-225.
40. Ibid.
41. "U.S. Administration Increasingly Concerned," NYT; 5 November 1957: p. 1.
42. Eisenhower, Waging Peace: p. 226.
43. NYT; 7 November 1957: p. 16.
44. NYT; 8 November 1957: p. 10.
45. Ibid.
46. Ibid.
47. For the timing of these earlier presentations to the President, see the testimony of Perkins and Cutler in Organizing for National Security: p. 294 and 594.
48. Sprague testimony in ibid.: p. 55.
49. NYT; 14 November 1957: p. 14.
50. Ibid.
51. Ibid.
52. See, for example, Halperin, op. cit.: p. 369-371; Roberts: p. 858: and Finney, John W. "Gaither Report Divides Leaders," NYT; 21 December 1957: p. 8.
53. Eisenhower, Waging Peace: pp. 226-227.
54. Eisenhower, Ibid.: p. 222.
55. Ibid.: p. 221.
56. Ibid.: p. 223.
57. Whitney, Robert F. "President Backs 'Alert' Advocates," NYT; 12 December 1957: p. 11.

58. Halperin: p. 371.
59. Whitney, in NYT, op. cit..
60. Halperin: p. 271.
61. NYT; 11 December 1957: p. 8. Others attending included Roswell Gilpatric, a former Undersecretary of the Air Force, and Franklin Lindsey, a New York management consultant. Invited but not attending were Chester Bowles, John J. McCloy, and Robert Lovett.
62. NYT; 12 December 1957: p. 11.
63. NYT; 11 December 1957: p. 8.
64. Halperin: p. 374.
65. NYT; 11 December 1957: p. 8.
66. NYT; 12 December 1957: p. 11.
67. John Foster Dulles, in particular, was strongly opposed to the Gaither Committee recommendations. See Waging Peace: pp. 221-222; and Halperin: pp. 373-374.
68. Halperin: p. 375.
69. U.S. Senate, Organizing for National Security: pp. 55-56.
70. "President Backs 'Alert' Advocates," NYT; 12 December 1957: p. 11.
71. NYT; 6 November 1957: p. 12.
72. U.S. Senate, Inquiry into Satellite and Missile Programs; op. cit.: p. 2.
73. Ibid.
74. NYT; 6 November 1957: pp. 1, 12.
75. U.S. Senate, Inquiry...: p. 3.
76. Ibid.: p. 12.
77. NYT; 6 November 1957: p. 12.
78. U.S. Senate, Inquiry...: p. 2.

79. Ibid.: p. 3.
80. "Mr. Gaither's Job," in The New York Herald Tribune; 26 August 1957: p. 12.
81. Ibid.
82. Eisenhower, Waging Peace: p. 221.
83. "Eisenhower Consults with 45 of Top Aides," NYT; 8 November 1957: p. 10.
84. NYT; 9 November 1957: p. 11.
85. Ibid.
86. New York Herald Tribune; 23 November 1957: p. 1.
87. Ibid.
88. Newsweek; 30 December 1957: p. 14.
89. The Washington Post; 20 December 1957: p. 1.
90. "Secret Service," in Newsweek; 6 January 1958: pp. 34-35.
91. Roberts, The Washington Post: The First 100 Years; op. cit.: p. 335.
92. The Washington Post; 20 December 1957: p. 1.
93. NYT; 21 December 1957: p. 8.
94. "The Gaither Report," NYT; 26 December 1957: p. 17.
95. Eisenhower, Waging Peace: p. 221.
96. "Gaither Won't Comment," NYT; 25 December 1957: p. 24.
97. Eisenhower, Waging Peace: p. 222.
98. The Congressional Record; Vol. 104, Part 1 (23 January 1958): pp. 858-859.

## 7. The Alarm is Sounded...But Where's the Fire?

Lack of access to the Gaither Committee Report itself was clearly not sufficient to preclude efforts by the Congress to sound a public alarm based upon the assumption that a "missile gap" existed. The very day that the President formally notified the Senate Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee that he would not be providing them with a copy of the Gaither Report, Senator Lyndon Johnson held a press conference in which he presented what he termed "a statement in the nature of an interim report" on the progress of the subcommittee's hearings.<sup>1</sup> He described the subcommittee's activities as "an educational process" which he hoped had been able "to present to our people important facts" about what he termed a national "race for survival."<sup>2</sup> Calling the Senate group's findings "of immediate urgency to our Government and our people," the Senator concluded that:

On the basis of sworn testimony by top scientists, leading industrialists, and government and military officials, it can now be said [that] the Soviet Union leads the United States in the development of ballistic missiles.... is rapidly closing the gap in manned air power, and.... has a system which enables it to develop new weapons in substantially less time than the United States.<sup>3</sup>

In order to meet this challenge, the subcommittee's report listed seventeen areas within which "decisive action must be taken." These included stepping up the dispersal and modernization of SAC bomber forces, putting more effort into anti-missile missile development, enhancing early warning capabilities, accelerating the Polaris SLBM program, giving increased attention to civil defense and shelter programs, and, of course, stepping up the production and acquisition of ICBMs. Not surprisingly, most of those areas were also included in the Gaither Committee's recommendations. They also closely paralleled the findings and recommendations of another report which, unlike the Gaither Report, had been written expressly for public release: the "Rockefeller Report" on the "Problems of U.S. Defense," which had been published as International Security: The Military Aspect on January 10th, 1958.<sup>4</sup>

The Rockefeller Report was actually one of seven special studies on national policy begun in 1956 under the sponsorship of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund. It was released well before the others were completed because, in the words of the panel in charge of coordinating the studies, "we need constantly to be reminded that we are in great peril and that we cannot substitute our preferences for our duty."<sup>5</sup> Under the direction of Henry A. Kissinger, the study presented the judgement of its twenty-member

committee that "all is not well with present U.S. security policies and operations."<sup>6</sup> As with the Gaither Committee, the Rockefeller Report saw the need for public awareness of the problem as the crucial first step in overcoming it. It was the conclusion of the report that:

Looking at the world from the perspective of our past isolation and recent nuclear supremacy, perhaps the most difficult thing for us to accept is the reality of our peril.... [T]he U.S. lag in missiles and space machines, however worrisome, is a symptom and not a cause. It reflects our national complacency over the past dozen years.... Our panel therefore hopes that the most important result of the recent Soviet advances in the field of earth satellites may be that they will serve to spark a deep review of the attitudes and policies affecting the security of our country and the free world.

The Rockefeller Report also took dead aim at the budgetary implications of Eisenhower's New Look defense programs. According to its findings, "recent budgetary ceilings...slowed down our research effort in many fields, causing us to lose ground to the USSR."<sup>8</sup> As a result, the report found that "in the military field, the technological capability of the Soviet Union is increasing at a pace obviously faster than that of the United States.... For perhaps the next two years, we still possess a superiority in strategic striking power.... But our position a year or two hence depends on decisions which must be taken immediately. Unless present trends are reversed, the world balance of power will shift in favor of the Soviet bloc."<sup>9</sup>

It was the opinion of the Rockefeller Report that such potential "deficiencies in our strategic posture" could be prevented "only by substantially increased defense expenditures," which would "run into billions of dollars and must rise substantially in each of the next few years."<sup>10</sup> The panel members projected that this could involve increases of above \$3 billion each year, but concluded that "when the security of the United States and the free world is at stake, cost cannot be the basic consideration."<sup>11</sup>

The Rockefeller Report was released just as Congress was reconvening in January of 1958, and news reports were quick to link its findings to the ongoing Congressional investigations of the missile gap. The New York Times observed that "the report was published at a time when another 'great debate' on military security seems at hand as a result of Soviet advances in technology, as exemplified in earth satellite and missile programs."<sup>12</sup> Another typical account was the "National Affairs" report of the week which appeared in Newsweek. "As Congress convened this week," the article reported, "the overriding issue confronting it was the state of the nation's defenses.... To many Congressmen in both parties it seemed that the signs of danger were just about everywhere...in the Russian Sputniks...complacency on the part of the

Administration...the Gaither Report with its clear warning of peril.... Finally, as if to confirm Congress' worst fears, the new Rockefeller Report on International Security came out this week."<sup>13</sup>

Association of the Rockefeller Report's findings with those of the Gaither Committee was also a common theme in the news accounts of its release. Even before the Rockefeller study was made public, Newsweek ran an article on the panel's activities under the headline "Another 'Gaither Report,'" which proclaimed that "[a]mid mounting furor over the Gaither report, another blue-ribbon citizen's committee hopes to publish soon an equally alarming size-up of U.S. defense. The group, sponsored by the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, Inc., talked with CIA officials, top military planners and other administration brass in preparing its findings.... Its defense suggestions closely parallel those of the Gaither group, committee members indicate."<sup>14</sup> Such comparisons were not diminished once the report was published, with the general opinion being that while the Rockefeller Report "leaned over backwards to avoid inflammatory language... its conclusions backed up those of the Gaither Report: a devastating picture of lagging technology, Pentagon snafus, and inadequate funds for defense."<sup>15</sup>

The similarity between the Rockefeller Report and the report of the Gaither Committee should not be surprising, given the fact that nearly one quarter of the members of the Rockefeller panel were associated in some manner with the Gaither study. Two of the three members of the President's Science Advisory Committee's subcommittee in charge of supervising the Gaither Committee's efforts, Dr. James B. Fisk and Dr. James R. Killian Jr., were on the Rockefeller panel. Both Colonel George A. Lincoln, a West Point professor of Social Science, and retired General James McCormack, vice president of MIT, served on the Rockefeller panel and on the Security Resources Panel which conducted the research for the Gaither Committee. Finally, Laurance Rockefeller and Roswell Gilpatric, while not officially associated with the Gaither Committee's activities, were both participants in the meeting at William Foster's home which sought to have the Gaither Report released.<sup>16</sup>

In fact, the publication of the Rockefeller Report was almost precisely what Foster and his guests had been hoping for when they urged that the Gaither Committee findings be made available to the public in an unclassified form. Its release, however, ultimately served to prove the point made by several of the attendants at that meeting, and later by William Sprague: that without the support of the President,

no group, no matter how prestigious, would be able to build the sort of consensus necessary to move the country to act on the basis of the warnings presented. As a column by Arthur Krock of the New York Times had indicated immediately following the meeting at Foster's home, "what Foster can do through his group and personally to alert the people to the gravity of the threat to the United States in the present world situation is limited by the fact that he is a private citizen."<sup>17</sup> The Rockefeller Report had demonstrated the accuracy of an accompanying Times editorial, which had remarked that "the people who know believe that it is perfectly feasible to produce a version of the [Gaither] report which would still have enough meat in it to help educate all of us to the realities."<sup>18</sup> But it was unable to overcome the limitations which Krock had identified. As the Times editorial had concluded, what was necessary was "a carefully thought out, consistent campaign emanating from the White House, the only place that has all the information...to inform the people of the facts."<sup>19</sup> And this was not to be forthcoming.

The problem was that, having "all the information," the President was not moved by cries of alarm from those who did not. Nevertheless, by the time Congress was back in session in January of 1958, those cries of alarm, emanating from the Congress, the Gaither and Rockefeller reports, the

military services, and the mass media, were too frequent and too strong for the President to silence them with his reassurances. The hopes of the Rockefeller panel that "Soviet advances in the field of earth satellites...will serve to spark a deep review of the basic attitudes and policies affecting the security of our country" were being fulfilled with a vengeance. As one account of the period observed, the impact of these multiple voices, each sounding its own version of the same basic alarm, was that "there was, in effect, but one issue presented by the prestige press in late 1957-early 1958: the waning defense posture of the United States. Not only was it the top priority - it was the only priority."<sup>20</sup>

That the priorities of the administration were at odds with the priorities of those seeking to "sound the alarm" on defense issues was clearly evident from the President's personal efforts to defuse the issue. Responding to complaints of administration complacency on defense issues, President Eisenhower called on the nation "to ignore the pessimists who said that the country was fearful and weak," and issued "a plea that national security issues be kept out of the year's political chess game."<sup>21</sup> Moreover, in his State of the Union and budget messages to the Congress during January of 1958, the President sought to counter the charges that the "missile gap" was a result of his

preoccupation with fiscal priorities by calling for a \$1.3 billion increase in spending for missiles and air defense.<sup>22</sup> He was able to obtain support for his efforts from leading Republicans in the Congress, with Senator Leverett Saltonstall, for example, charging that "the danger facing the country might have been exaggerated in some newspaper reports."<sup>23</sup> Still, as James Reston observed in his commentary on Eisenhower's State of the Union Message, "the President disarmed his critics, [but] he did not silence them."<sup>24</sup>

The inability of the President to silence his critics was in part due to the fact that, as he conceded, "most of us did not anticipate the intensity of the psychological impact upon the world of the launching of the first earth satellite."<sup>25</sup> According to one study, "Eisenhower had seriously miscalculated. He had correctly perceived the gravity of Sputnik as a threat to his program of the 'long pull,' but failed to appreciate how deeply the shock waves had penetrated the American polity."<sup>26</sup> Whether Eisenhower had actually "miscalculated," or instead made a conscious decision not to reveal the classified information which might have effectively silenced his critics, the result was an impasse in which neither the President nor his critics were able to effectively set the public agenda for the next several years. On the day the President had given his

first major "reassurance" speech on national defense, the editors of Missiles and Rockets magazine took out a full page advertisement in the New York Times which proclaimed that "You Needn't Be a Scientist To Understand Sputnick (sic) Mr. President, But You Must Be a Leader."<sup>27</sup> The President was willing to lead, but those who were alarmed by the charges of a "missile gap" were not willing to follow in the direction in which he chose to go!

The President's problems were compounded by the fact that the position he was advocating was essentially a reactive one. His charges that things were not as bad as others were saying had the effect of conceding the initiative to his administration's critics. During his last three years in office, this frequently left him in the position of devoting large portions of his speeches and press conferences to presenting rebuttals to charges which had already been raised in the press by others. The pattern was set as Congress returned to Washington in January of 1958, when Senator Johnson pre-empted the President's State of the Union message with his own position paper on "the state of the nation's readiness."<sup>28</sup> As columnist James Reston described it, Lyndon Johnson began by announcing that "'as a courtesy to the President...there would be no speeches in the Senate today pending Thursday's State of the Union Message.' Whereupon the speeches suddenly

appeared from the mimeograph proclaiming the nation's peril and outlining a Democratic program for their (sic) resolution.<sup>29</sup> As a result, much of the President's own message pertaining to defense was treated in the media as a reply to the Democratic charges.<sup>30</sup>

The pattern was repeated again and again over the next several years. In August of 1958, the President found himself using a portion of a press conference to defend his administration's record against charges leveled by retired Army General James Gavin, who had resigned in January after disagreeing with the administration over the status of the Army's missile program.<sup>31</sup> In July of 1959 the scene was re-enacted with only the source of the charges changed: this time it was a news column by Drew Pearson and Jack Anderson which had asserted that the President's policies had set U.S. missile programs back ten years.<sup>32</sup> Six months later, it was a speech by General Thomas S. Power, the Commander of the Strategic Air Command, which set the tone for the debates of the election year by charging that "the Soviets could virtually wipe out our entire nuclear strike capability within a span of 30 minutes."<sup>33</sup>

The speech by General Power was particularly irritating to the President, coming on the heels of his instructions to the Pentagon to play down what he saw as exaggerated

fears of a missile gap in forthcoming studies.<sup>34</sup> The President, again on the defensive, charged his SAC chief with expressing a "parochial viewpoint," and denied the General's claims of impending American vulnerability.<sup>35</sup> But the damage had been done. The General's charges were quickly picked up by columnist Joseph Alsop, who used them to generate a four-day series of front page attacks on the Administration's defense programs.<sup>36</sup> According to Alsop, General Power's speech was "the first authoritative statement, from a source commanding absolute belief, of the missile capability the Soviets now need to bring this country to its knees."<sup>37</sup> Alsop's columns, distributed to approximately 185 papers throughout the nation, were soon being used as "evidence" of a continuing "missile gap" by Administration critics within the Congress.<sup>38</sup> So widely used were such media accounts in the ongoing Congressional hearings that one account proclaimed that "often a member of either chamber would cite [journalists'] views as authoritative evidence - equally as, if not more, authoritative than the testimony of administration witnesses."<sup>39</sup>

Within a week after Mr. Alsop's series of articles began, General Power was called to be the lead witness in another round of hearings conducted by Lyndon Johnson's Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee. After having the

full text of his speech read into the record, General Power was then questioned not on the basis of his speech, but on the basis of Alsop's comments about it! Senator Howard Cannon (D-Nevada) opened this line of questioning, observing that "I read an interesting article by Mr. Alsop a few days ago on your speech, and I would like to ask you a few questions about it."<sup>40</sup> The Senator then proceeded to quote at length from the first article of Mr. Alsop's series, using the press account to make the point that:

The incredible thing about the official approach to the missile gap is the needlessness of the hair-raising risk that is being run. In order to save some hundreds of millions of dollars, the Eisenhower administration is literally playing a gigantic game<sup>41</sup> of Russian roulette with the national future.

The source of Senator Cannon's and Joseph Alsop's concern over this "game of Russian roulette" was not any report of a further increase in Soviet strategic capability. Rather, that concern was a response to what Alsop described as "two budgetarily convenient downgradings of national intelligence estimates" of the Kremlin's ballistic missile capabilities.<sup>42</sup> The immediate cause of these charges appeared to be a remark by Secretary of Defense Thomas Gates to the New York Times, in which he "dismissed General Power's analysis of the effectiveness of a Soviet missile attack as 'unrealistic' and 'oversimplified'" on the basis of administration intelligence estimates which showed that

the Soviet Union did not have a significant ICBM capability. (The article on Gates' statement was also used in the Congressional hearings.)<sup>43</sup> Such administration efforts to correct the record and reassure the public were viewed by Alsop and the administration's critics in Congress as further evidence of either complacency or, worse, attempts to deliberately deceive the public. Mr. Alsop appeared particularly concerned, writing that:

On the face of it, there is something very fishy about these repeated, strikingly convenient downgradings of intelligence estimates. How can anyone be so sure that Nikita S. Khrushchev was lying, in late 1958, when he stated that Soviet ICBMs were already 'in serial production?' How [can anyone] prove that he was being deliberately misleading, more recently, when he seemed to say that a single Soviet factory had turned out 250 ICBMs last year?<sup>44</sup>

President Eisenhower, of course, could prove that Khrushchev's propaganda statements were in fact "deliberately misleading," by the evidence provided to him by the U-2 program. In his memoirs, the President makes this point quite explicitly, observing that "during the four years of its operations, the U-2 program produced intelligence of critical importance to the United States. Perhaps as important as the positive information...was the negative information it produced - what the Soviets did not have. Intelligence gained from this source provided proof that the horrors of the alleged 'bomber gap' and the later

'missile gap' were nothing more than imaginative creations of irresponsibility."<sup>45</sup> However, at the time, the President was still convinced that "secrecy was of the essence" for the U-2 program, and that "any leak of information...could compel abandonment" of the program of overflights of the Soviet Union.<sup>46</sup> As a result, the administration's rebuttals of Khrushchev's claims were couched in vague terms which referred to the need to consider evidence of Soviet "intentions," as well as raw capabilities, in developing intelligence assessments of projected ICBM production levels.

Having neither access to nor knowledge about the U-2 intelligence program, critics of the administration in Congress and the press were skeptical about such reassuring intelligence estimates.<sup>47</sup> Senator Johnson expressed his concern upon reconvening his subcommittee on February 2nd, 1960, by attacking Defense Secretary Gates' public statements. The Secretary, Johnson observed, "has said that our defense program is no longer based on what the Kremlin is capable of doing, but what 'we believe he probably will do.' This reasoning seems to imply the enemy will not do all he is capable of doing."<sup>48</sup> The Senator seemed to share Joseph Alsop's reluctance to endorse such a line of reasoning, and echoed the columnist's sentiments that "Pearl Harbor was the result the last time the

American Government based its defense posture on what it believed a hostile power would probably do and not on what the hostile power was capable of doing.<sup>49</sup> "It is difficult," the subcommittee Chairman observed, "to reconcile some of the reassuring statements made in public with...information already made available to the Preparedness and Space Committees. One main purpose of these hearings during the next few days will be to determine the compatibility of public statements with the facts presented behind closed doors."<sup>50</sup>

Given the President's refusal to release the U-2 information, it is not surprising that after nearly a month of testimony Senator Johnson was forced to admit that confusion still remained concerning intelligence estimates about the alleged missile gap.<sup>51</sup> If his subcommittee hearings had not been able to "reconcile" the various estimates, however, they had focused a tremendous amount of media attention on the fact that differences of opinion existed. During the two months in which the Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee was conducting its investigations, front page media coverage of the "missile gap" debate increased by over 1000% when compared with the preceding two months.<sup>52</sup> There was even media coverage of the media coverage, with a running debate over whether Democratic members of the subcommittee were leaking

classified information to columnist Alsop in an effort to embarrass the administration.<sup>53</sup>

As might have been expected, given the Administration's desire to play down the issue of a "missile gap," the preponderance of the news stories relating to it during this period originated with the Congress. Looking again at front page news stories in the New York Times during the first months of 1960, articles which cited Congressional sources as a primary basis for their information outnumbered those quoting the President by a factor of two-to-one.<sup>54</sup> The evidence clearly suggests that the Eisenhower administration was not in control of setting the media or public agendas concerning the missile gap at the start of the 1960 Presidential election year. In fact, this same basic pattern, in which increased media coverage of the "missile gap" closely parallels periods of Congressional hearings on national preparedness and defense matters, obtains for virtually the entire second Eisenhower administration. Figures for this four year period indicate that twice as many articles relating to the status of American and Soviet missile programs appeared on the front page during months in which Congressional hearings were being held than during any other periods.<sup>55</sup> With such heavy media attention being focused on those who were in the forefront of the attack on Eisenhower's New Look policies,

it is little wonder that one study of this period concluded that the President was "virtually powerless" to avoid being "literally deluged with the charges of his many critics [on defense matters]...from late 1957 until the end of his public service."<sup>56</sup>

Significantly, this "deluge" of Congressional and media criticism proved insufficient to build any sort of a public consensus in opposition to President Eisenhower's stand on defense spending during this period. Samuel Huntington, writing about the role of public opinion on defense policies, came to the conclusion that even if critics "vigorously and articulately attack the administration.... [t]he public listens to the administration, not the critics."<sup>57</sup> Public opinion research surveys in the aftermath of Sputnik and throughout the period of the "missile gap" debate tend to support his conclusions. Despite President Eisenhower's concern over the "near hysteria" he felt might sweep the country after Sputnik, the evidence found in one survey of polls conducted by six different research agencies throughout the late 1950s paints a somewhat different picture. According to the author of this survey, "...the data are at considerable variance both with the popular image regarding the nature of [the public] responses...and with the reactions of the mass media and many of the issue makers."<sup>58</sup>

What that data demonstrated, according to one of the pollsters who was involved in gathering it, was "how closely the public's reactions corresponded to the explanatory 'line' which was coming from the White House." Describing his findings in an article on "Sputnik and American Public Opinion," researcher Samuel Lubell concluded that:

Relatively few persons repeated the criticisms which were being printed in newspaper editorials or were being made by members of Congress or by scientists. In talking about Sputnik, most people tended to paraphrase what Eisenhower himself had said.... [T]he feeling I was left with was that through this whole period, the public generally tended to follow the President's lead. In no community did I find any tendency on the part of the public to look for leadership to anyone else.

While Lubell's research was confined to the immediate post-Sputnik period, there is ample evidence to substantiate his conclusions for most of the second Eisenhower administration. This is especially evident in polls on defense spending, where the campaign to win support for the "New Look" during his first term had apparently provided the President with some semblance of having the initiative. According to polls conducted as late as April of 1960, 45% of the respondents expressed their belief that the amount being spent on national defense was "about right," while only 21% were in favor of

increased defense spending.<sup>60</sup> These results are almost identical to polls taken during Eisenhower's first term in office: hardly the results that would have been expected if the calls for crash programs to catch the Russians (such as those proposed by the Gaither and Rockefeller reports) had contributed significantly to building a new public consensus.<sup>61</sup>

These findings should not, however, be construed as indicating that the media and the administration's critics had no effect on public opinion. The polls clearly show that, despite the administration's efforts to reassure the country that there was no significant missile gap, the public's views as to the existence of such a gap were more in tune with the Congressional than the administration position. Whereas in 1955 over 77% of those polled had indicated their confidence that the United States held the edge on the Soviet Union in military technology, by October of 1958 some 40% saw the Russians as leading in the field of long range missiles (compared to 37% who believed the U.S. was still ahead), and by February of 1960 the proportion who believed that the U.S. was behind the USSR had grown to 47%.<sup>62</sup> Corresponding to this shift in the perception of American military strength compared to that of the Russians was a finding by yet another survey that 67% of their sample agreed with the statement that "we have

been too smug and complacent about our national strength," a comment which could have been taken almost directly from either the Gaither or Rockefeller reports.<sup>63</sup>

Such findings would appear to support the position that the tremendous volume of media coverage about the missile gap and the need to "catch" the Russians clearly placed the concept of a "gap" and a need to close it in the public consciousness. What it was unable to accomplish, however, was to generate any observable consensus on how important the gap was or on how it should be closed. Thus pollsters during this period came up with such apparently contradictory results as the response cited above on national complacency at the same time that they were finding "only 13% of the sample believed that the US was dangerously behind Russia in developing advanced weapons" while some 82% felt that "either we would easily catch up or were still at least even."<sup>64</sup> Moreover, when specific proposals were offered as possibilities for public responses to questions about how the United States might best respond to the reported gap, over 70% consistently rejected the option of raising taxes to pay for an increase in defense spending.<sup>65</sup> Despite the apparent public concern that a missile gap existed, the fact that the President was not among those calling for significantly increased levels of spending to close it seems to have been sufficient to

preclude the development of a public consensus in support of such plans. The evidence thus tends to confirm Samuel Lubell's observation in the weeks immediately following the launching of the first Sputnik, when he concluded that "the public will follow the President in whatever he asks to support a greater defense effort - but if the President does not ask for enough the public is not likely to demand that more be done."<sup>66</sup>

The fact that Eisenhower and his Republican Administration were clearly not demanding that "more be done" in the face of the renewed furor over the missile gap in early 1960 was a key factor in placing that issue firmly on the agenda for the 1960 presidential election campaign. Virtually all of the Democratic candidates for their party's nomination for President were strong supporters of the position that a "gap" existed and that Eisenhower's complacency and defense policies were responsible for it. Lyndon Johnson and Stuart Symington had both been active instigators of the charges that a missile gap existed, and John Kennedy had begun speaking out on the subject almost immediately after the launching of Sputnik.<sup>67</sup> Even Hubert Humphrey had been an early critic of the administration on the issue of national defense, observing in December of 1957 that "[t]he people trusted Ike implicitly in defense matters and now they have found that trust misplaced. They

feel they have not been told the truth about the state of our defenses and about Soviet strength."<sup>68</sup>

The positions of the Democratic Party's leading candidates were in part reflections of the intensely partisan debate which seemed to color efforts to "tell the truth about the state of our defenses" in the aftermath of Sputnik. Samuel Lubell noticed this trend at an early stage in the missile gap debates, observing that within the six weeks immediately after the launching of the Soviet satellite, "the sharpest charges (that we've fallen flat on our faces) were usually voiced by partisan Democrats."<sup>69</sup> Such findings were not surprising, given the speed with which the party's leadership seized on the issue as a vehicle for launching attacks on the Republican administration. Two days after Sputnik was placed in orbit, the New York Times gave page one coverage to the news that "Democratic Senators blamed the Eisenhower Administration's economy program today for the Soviet triumph in launching the first earth satellite."<sup>70</sup> Within a week, the Times reported that "the Democratic National Committee opened a political offensive on the Eisenhower Administration for having been beaten in the launching of the first satellite." The article went on to present a "statement signed by twenty members of the Democratic Advisory Committee, including former President Harry S.

Truman, [which] charged the administration with 'complacency.'"<sup>71</sup> As one subsequent study of the debate over the missile gap observed:

By definition, a two-party democracy should have a party of the 'opposition,' and in this case the party of opposition was the Democratic Party. At the national party level, the conflict between the Democratic and Republican National Committees continued throughout the missile debate, and the Democratic Advisory Council was the constant critic of the Eisenhower Administration.<sup>72</sup>

Arthur Krock, writing for the New York Times, was equally impressed by the almost inevitable nature of the partisan overtones which characterized the missile gap debate. In a column titled "GOP On Defensive on Issue of Security," written the day after the Democratic National Committee statement was released, Krock pointed out that "there is general acceptance of the opinion that Sputnik...may be a courier of such dire portent to national security that considerations of partisan politics have no place in the discussion of how this happened and what to do about it." Nevertheless, he continued, "there is general acceptance also of the forecast that considerations of partisan politics will be plainly visible in this same discussion." He saw this as "a paradox, but one that is both historic and respectable" in the context of a democratic system such as ours. As Krock explained:

Whenever an incident or a train of incidents

lends support to the charge that the party in executive power has failed adequately to protect national security as measured in current world circumstances, the opposition has employed the development as an argument to the people as to why it<sup>73</sup> should be called to take over that power.

It should not have been a surprise to anyone, therefore, when the issue of the "missile gap" became a major factor in the Presidential elections of 1960. Moreover, if the American domestic political situation had not been sufficient to place the issue on the election agenda, Nikita Khrushchev chose the election year to renew his propaganda barrage touting the superiority of the Soviet military system. Perhaps most dramatic were his claims, delivered during a speech to the U.N. General Assembly in October, that Soviet missiles "were coming off assembly lines like sausages!"<sup>74</sup> Within a week after the Soviet Premier's New York address, Presidential candidate John F. Kennedy incorporated the missile gap and defense preparedness as central issues in his campaign speeches.<sup>75</sup> By the end of the month, he was scoring the Republican administration for allowing the Soviets to develop an ICBM lead which "would last for the next few years."<sup>76</sup>

Curiously, despite the fact that even some newsmen subsequently recalled that the missile gap had been "an issue which played a major part in the last Presidential campaign,"<sup>77</sup> there was very little news coverage focusing

on the subject during the campaign. The pattern of coverage seems to lend some credibility to those who charge that news coverage of elections in America concentrates on the "horse race" aspects of the process at the expense of covering the issues.<sup>78</sup> From the time of the party nominating conventions through the November elections, the "missile gap" was simply not a page one issue.<sup>79</sup> The only exception to this pattern, in fact, was Khrushchev's speech to the United Nations, which made page one of the New York Times on October 12th. The matter of the missile gap did not return to regular front page coverage until February of 1961, after Kennedy had come into office.<sup>80</sup>

When the missile gap did reappear on the front page, it was in the form of what proved to be an embarrassing leak of a background briefing by Kennedy's newly appointed Secretary of Defense, Robert McNamara, who was quoted as having denied the existence of a "gap."<sup>81</sup> Although the 6 February briefing was supposed to have been "off the record," the next day the front page of the New York Times proclaimed in its lead article that "Kennedy Defense Study Finds No Evidence of 'Missile Gap.'"<sup>82</sup> The defense study was reportedly one which the newly elected President had publicly requested the week before, when in his first State of the Union Address he had instructed McNamara to conduct a study of the entire defense strategy and weapons systems

of the United States.<sup>83</sup> However, the President quickly disavowed the claim that the report repudiated his earlier claims that a gap existed, holding that the Administration had "come to no conclusions" on the subject of the gap, and observing that the study was not yet complete.<sup>84</sup>

President Kennedy's actions over the next several months certainly gave no indication that he believed that the "missile gap" was over. Despite several news articles in Time, Newsweek, and US News and World Report which pronounced that the "truth about the missile gap" now showed it to have been "primarily political," the administration stuck by its earlier statements that a speedy build up was required.<sup>85</sup> In a March 28th message to the Congress revising Eisenhower's FY-1962 budget, President Kennedy specifically requested a major increase in funding for ICBM programs.<sup>86</sup> In May, after Secretary McNamara had testified before the House Committee on Appropriations that a missile gap did exist, the Congress authorized a \$3.9 billion increase in defense spending for missiles for 1962.<sup>87</sup>

If a missile gap had existed, the Kennedy Administration was clearly embarked on a program designed to close it. However, in November of 1961, the long awaited assessment of the relative defense postures of the United States and

the Soviet Union was finally completed, and the results provided proof once and for all that Eisenhower had been right in rejecting the claim that there was any significant missile gap. As the New York Times proclaimed just slightly over four years after the Gaither Committee had presented its report, the latest intelligence estimates were to "show [that the] US leads [the] USSR in combat-ready ICBMs and has averted the predicted '62 missile gap."<sup>88</sup> According to the newly released intelligence figures, the United States had 48 Atlas ICBMs and 80 Polaris SLBMs capable of striking the Soviet Union, while the Russians had at best 50 ICBMs which could reach the United States.<sup>89</sup> When the American lead in strategic bombers was included in the calculations, the result was "a very considerable U.S. advantage in strategic deterrent strength."<sup>90</sup>

President Kennedy, while not specifically repudiating his earlier charges of a missile gap (which he maintained had been "based on public statements by those in a position to know in the late years of the 1950's"), now acknowledged that "based on our present assessments and our intelligence...we would not trade places with anyone in the world."<sup>91</sup> Even the Alsop brothers (who had been the media conduits for several of those "public statements by those in a position to know") admitted that, despite having

earlier insisted that the Kremlin would have as many as 200 ICBMs operational by the end of the year, a "recent and exceedingly careful recalibration of the probable nuclear striking power of the Soviet Union" had reduced this number "to less than a quarter of the former figure." Since all of the military intelligence agencies apparently now agreed, Joseph Alsop concluded that "one must tentatively accept this maximum as realistic and convincing."<sup>92</sup> By December of the following year, Stuart Alsop was actually reporting Secretary of Defense McNamara's confident statement that "the missile gap was a myth which had been ended."<sup>93</sup>

The Alsop brothers' virtual reversal of their position as champions of the forces which had been sounding the alarm about the "missile gap" just one year earlier provides a dramatic illustration of a crucial point made by columnist Hanson Baldwin in the "obituary" he wrote for the gap following the release of the new intelligence estimates. It was significant, he believed, to note that:

What has changed in the past year is not finished hardware; there has been no miraculous speed-up in our missile program or a slow-down in the Russian build-up. Only opinions have changed.<sup>94</sup>

This study highlights the crucial fact that those opinions clearly mattered. Gabriel Almond, in an article

on "Public Opinion and the Development of Space Technology" which he wrote as the missile gap controversy was drawing to a close, observed that "public opinion may be viewed as 'latent policy' and 'latent politics.' It not only indicates potential changes in public policy and the political elite, it is a most significant component of that public policy."<sup>95</sup> The entire debate over the "missile gap" can best be understood as a battle to shape that "latent policy" in such a manner as to compel its adoption as public policy. Such a battle is in many respects a unique aspect of forms of government which are based on the concept of popular consent. As pollster Samuel Lubell observed in attempting to explain his findings in the aftermath of Sputnik:

It is the nature of our democracy that the resources needed to defend the nation are normally in the hands of the people. Before these resources can be turned against a foreign foe they must first be collected up from the people through appropriations and taxes. This, in turn, makes every effort to marshall these resources something of a battle between the people and their own government. The role of leadership is not to avoid the battle, but to show us where our true interest lies, so that we will yield to our <sup>96</sup> government what is needed to preserve our lives.

The weapons used by the leadership when it joins such a battle are most frequently public statements (or leaks of private statements) reported in the mass media. As the history of the debate over the missile gap clearly

demonstrates, the battle may also be joined by interests competing with the leadership in efforts to "show where our true interest lies," and such interests have those same weapons available to them. In the case of the missile gap, those competing interests included Congressional leaders, the political parties, individual branches of our military services, news reporters and columnists, and even spokesmen for foreign governments.

The available evidence indicates that each of these parties to the debate was able to exert a significant influence over the process of placing concern about the missile gap on the public agenda, although when it came to moving from the area of Almond's "latent policy" to a consensus on actual policy, the President and his administration spokesmen appear to have enjoyed an advantage over their competitors. Nevertheless, the administration was on the defensive over the missile gap issue for virtually all of Eisenhower's second term in office. The President's refusal to release the intelligence gathered by the U-2 clearly contributed to the inability of his administration to end the debate over the missile gap at an early date. Still, the continuation of that debate, despite Eisenhower's repeated denials that a gap existed, makes it difficult to find a more vivid example of Bernard Cohen's maxim that "in the United

States...the media may be used to sustain the position of any holder of power anywhere in the system; they may be used as effectively against an administration as on behalf of one."<sup>97</sup> As was stated at the outset of this study, it is one of the marks of an open society that such an opportunity should exist. Given the number of "holders of power" who took advantage of this opportunity to make the "missile gap" an issue in the media, and the subsequent intensity of their debates over what ultimately proved "not to be an issue at all," Hanson Baldwin's description of the entire matter as having had "an Alice-in-Wonderland quality about it which could only flourish in a democracy" seems entirely appropriate.<sup>98</sup>

Notes for Chapter 7

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1. NYT; 24 January 1958: p. 6.
  2. Ibid.
  3. Ibid.
  4. Rockefeller Brothers Fund, Special Studies Report: International Security: The Military Aspect; Doubleday Headline Publications; Garden City N.Y.: 1958.
  5. Ibid.: p. 4.
  6. Ibid.: p. 6
  7. Ibid.: pp. 6-8.
  8. Ibid.: p. 55.
  9. Ibid.: pp. 17-19.
  10. Ibid.: p. 57.
  11. Ibid.: p. 61.
  12. NYT; 6 January 1958: p. 1.
  13. "Perils, Probes, & the Job Ahead," Newsweek; 13 January 1958: p. 17.
  14. "Another 'Gaither Report,'" Newsweek; 30 December 1957: p. 7.
  15. Newsweek; 13 January 1958: pp. 17-18.
  16. Based on a comparison of the names listed in the Gaither Committee Report, pp. 42-45; the Rockefeller Report on International Security, pp. 4-7; and the account of the meeting at Foster's home in the NYT, 12 Dec. 1957, p. 11.

17. "The Limits on 'Helping the President,'" NYT; 13 December 1957: p. 26.
18. "Knowing The Facts," NYT; 13 December 1957: p. 26.
19. Ibid.
20. Aliano: p. 152.
21. Baker, Russell. "Eisenhower Urges '58 Campaign Ban on Defense Issues;" NYT; 21 January 1958: p. 1.
22. NYT; 8 Jan 1958: p. 1.
23. Ibid.
24. NYT; 10 January 1958: p. 1.
25. NYT; 10 January 1958: p. 1.
26. Aliano: p. 52.
27. NYT; 7 November 1957: p. 31.
28. NYT; 8 January 1958: p. 1.
29. "Senator Johnson's Move," NYT; 8 January 1958: p. 10.
30. NYT; 10 January 1958: p. 1.
31. Eisenhower, "News Conference, 20 August 1958," in Public Papers, 1958: p. 649.
32. Eisenhower, "News Conference, 22 July 1959," in Ibid., 1959: p. 542.
33. NYT; 29 January 1960: p. 6: New York Herald Tribune; 25 January 1960: p. 1.
34. "Pentagon Study to Minimize Fear of Missile Gap," NYT; 11 January 1960: p.1.
35. Eisenhower, "News Conference, 3 February 1960," in Public Papers, 1960: p. 145.
36. Alsop, Joseph. "Conflicts on the Missile Gap," in The New York Herald Tribune; 25-27 January 1960: p. 1; 28 January 1960: p. 15.
37. Ibid., 25 January 1960: p. 1.

38. "Brothers In Arms," Newsweek; 11 November 1957: p. 81.
39. Aliano: p. 167.
40. U.S. Senate, Missiles, Space, and Other Major Defense Matters; Hearings before the Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee in conjunction with the Committee on Aeronautical and Space Sciences; 86th Congress, 2nd Session; 2 Feb - 16 Mar 1960; USGPO, Washington D.C.; 1960: p. 38.
41. Ibid.
42. Alsop, "U.S. Playing Russian Roulette?" New York Herald Tribune; 28 January 1960: p. 15.
43. Missiles, Space, and Other Major Defense Matters: p. 2, 13.
44. Alsop, "U.S. Playing Russian Roulette;" op. cit.
45. Eisenhower, Waging Peace: p. 547 n.
46. Ibid.: p. 544.
47. As far as Eisenhower was aware, no member of Congress knew of the U-2 program until after the shootdown of Francis Gary Powers on 1 May 1960: Ibid., pp. 544-545.
48. Missiles, Space, and Other...: p. 2.
49. Alsop, "U.S. Playing Russian Roulette?" op. cit.
50. Missiles, Space, and Other...: p. 2.
51. NYT; 25 February 1960: p. 1.
52. NYT; In November-December 1959, there were only 2 stories about the gap on page one; in January-February of 1960, there were 21!
53. See NYT articles from 9 February 1960, p. 1; 15 February, p. 3; 20 February, p. 1; 24 February, p. 13; and 2 March 1960, p. 6.
54. From 1 Jan. through 31 Mar. 1960, the President was a primary source for 6 page one articles in the NYT, with Congress cited for 13. Three articles were based on administration sources other than the President. These totals include 4 articles citing both Congress and

Administration sources.

55. Based on 1342 articles on "Missiles" listed in the NYT Indices for 1957-1960. 224 of these ran on page one. During the 16 months in which Congress held such hearings, the average was 7.13 page-one articles per month. For the remaining 32 months, the average was 3.44.

56. Aliano: pp. 168-169.

57. Huntington, Samuel. The Common Defense; Columbia University Press, New York and London; 1961: p. 241.

58. Michael, Donald N. "The Beginning of the Space Age and American Public Opinion," Public Opinion Quarterly; Vol. XXIV, No. 4 (Winter 1960): p. 573.

59. Lubell, Samuel. "Sputnik and Public Opinion," Columbia University Forum; Vol. I, No. 1 (Winter 1957): p. 18.

60. Erskine, Hazel Gaudet. "The Polls: Defense, Peace, and Space," Public Opinion Quarterly; Vol. XXV, No. 3 (Fall 1961): p. 485.

61. The earlier poll results, from September 1953, showed 45% supporting existing spending levels and 22% favoring an increase. Ibid.

62. Ibid.: p. 484.

63. Opinion Research Corporation poll, 1958, cited in Michael, op. cit.: p. 577.

64. Ibid.: p. 579.

65. Ibid.

66. Lubell: p. 18.

67. "Kennedy Assails US Missile Lag," NYT; 7 November 1957: p. 16.

68. "What Congress Hears: We'd Better Get Busy," Newsweek; 30 December 1957: p. 15.

69. Lubell: p. 17.

70. NYT; 6 October 1957: p. 1.

71. NYT; 12 October 1957: p. 1.

72. Bottome: p. 202.
73. NYT; 13 October 1957: Section 4, p. 1.
74. NYT; 12 October 1960: p. 1.
75. Bottome: p. 202, indicates that this was not a major theme of Kennedy's campaign prior to October.
76. NYT; 19 October 1960: p. 39.
77. See Hanson Baldwin's column, "New Figures Close 'Missile Gap,'" NYT; 26 November 1961: Section E, p. 4.
78. See, for example, Thomas Patterson, "The 1976 Horserace," The Wilson Quarterly; Volume I, Number 3 (Spring 1977): pp. 73-79.
79. Based on the NYT Index, July-November 1960, under the heading of "Missiles." From the time of the Democratic and Republican National Conventions through election day, there were only 37 articles on the subject, and only one mention of the issue on page one.
80. Ibid.: 1960-1961.
81. Bottome: pp. 150-151.
82. NYT; 7 February 1961: p. 1.
83. NYT, 31 January 1961: p. 17.
84. NYT; 8 February 1961: p. 1; and 9 February 1961: pp. 1, 18.
85. Time; 17 February 1961: p. 12; Newsweek; 20 February 1961: p. 24; and US News & World Report; 27 February 1961: p. 41.
86. NYT; 29 March 1961: pp. 1, 16.
87. U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Appropriations, Hearings on DoD Appropriations for 1962; 87th Congress, 1st session (April 1961): Part 3, p. 60; and NYT; 16 and 25 May 1961: p. 1.
88. NYT; 19 November 1961: p. 1.
89. Ibid.
90. Baldwin, op. cit.

91. Kennedy, Presidential Press Conference, 8 November 1961, as quoted in Bottome: p. 166.
92. Alsop, Joseph. "Facts About the Military Balance," The Washington Post; 25 September 1961: p. A-13.
93. Alsop, Stuart. "McNamara Thinks About the Unthinkable," The Saturday Evening Post; 1 December 1962: p. 18.
94. Baldwin, op.cit.
95. Almond, Gabriel. "Public Opinion and the Development of Space Technology," Public Opinion Quarterly; Vol. XXIV, No. 4 (Winter 1960): p. 553.
96. Lubell, op. cit.: p. 21.
97. Cohen, Bernard. The Press and Foreign Policy; Princeton University Press, Princeton N.J.; 1963: p. 16.
98. Baldwin, op. cit.

## Section IV

### **Opening and Closing The "Window of Vulnerability"**

"Public opinion must be informed before it can reach considered judgments and make them effective in our democratic system. Time, weariness, and the tragic experience of Vietnam have weakened the bipartisan consensus which sustained our foreign policy between 1940 and the mid-60s. We must build a fresh consensus to expand the opportunities and diminish the dangers of a world in flux."

Eugene Rostow

#### **8. Alice Through the Looking Glass:**

##### **Team-B Locates Another Missile Gap**

During the 1980 Presidential election campaign, Republican candidate Ronald Reagan and a group of his advisors were being shown through the news room at the New York Times when they were approached by columnist Tom Wicker. The Times' newsmen posed a question to the group: "What would Mr. Reagan do," he asked, "if upon taking office he learned that there was no 'window of vulnerability' - even as John F. Kennedy found in 1961 that the 'missile gap' against which he had campaigned did not exist?" According to Mr. Wicker's subsequent account of the encounter, the soon-to-be President's response "was to stare at me as if I

were crazy," while one of his aides informed the columnist that "no such revelation could possibly occur; the 'window' was definitely open."<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, within three years, the "window of vulnerability," if it had not been closed, had clearly been, in Wicker's words, "narrowed...to a mere crack through which no real-world Soviet attack need be feared."<sup>2</sup>

Mr. Wicker's encounter serves as a striking example of the parallels which may be drawn between the "missile gap" of the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations and the "window of vulnerability" which opened and shut during the Carter and Reagan presidencies. If the debate over American defense policy in the late 1950s and early 1960s had an "Alice-in-Wonderland" quality about it, then the debate over the "window of vulnerability" in the late 1970s and early 1980s was surely a case of Alice falling back "through the looking glass." In both cases America's strategic deterrent forces were said to be threatened by an advance in Soviet missile technology which occurred more rapidly than our intelligence had predicted. In both cases these charges were made public in the aftermath of special commissions which studied intelligence information relative to the Soviet strategic threat to the United States. In both cases the charges of a "gap" or a "window" generated heated public debates between the administration and the

Congress over the extent of the threat and the adequacy of the American response. In both cases these debates carried over into Presidential election campaigns. And in both cases the rhetoric associated with the threat was reduced not so much as a result of an American defense build-up as by an administration's decision to define the threat away.

Tom Wicker's observations attest to the fact that such similarities did not go unnoticed at the time. Journalists, scholars and politicians involved in the debate over the "window" all drew comparisons between the issue of ICBM vulnerability in the 1980s and the "gap" in ICBM capabilities which was supposed to have existed in the late 1950s and early 60s. In addition to Wicker's columns in the New York Times, for example, the Washington Post observed in October of 1981 that the debate over the "window" seemed to be headed in the same direction as that over the earlier missile gap.<sup>3</sup> Within the academic community, Professor Robert H. Johnson of Colgate University used the two cases (along with NSC-68) as prime examples of what he termed the "periods of peril" syndrome, in which the threat of some future Soviet military advantage is used to spur increases in American defense spending.<sup>4</sup>

Congressional hearings and testimony throughout the

period of the "window" provide similar examples of such comparisons. Representative Les Aspin (D-Wis) introduced his subcommittee's hearings in the House of Representatives on "Soviet Strategic Forces" in early 1980 by drawing attention to the parallels between the ongoing debate and "some of the intelligence forecasts of the past, in particular looking at our estimates of the first Soviet explosion of the atomic bomb...at the missile gap in the late 1950s...and now finally at the projections of the rate of improvement of Soviet [strategic] weapons in terms of yield and accuracy" on which the claims of an impending window of vulnerability hinged.<sup>5</sup> And as the debate over the prospects of an open window of vulnerability drew to a close in 1983, the Senate heard retired Admiral Noel Gayler, a former director of the National Security Agency, testify that in his view, "the argument that there is a 'window of vulnerability' has gone the way of the "bomber gap" and the 'missile gap.' It is now conceded...that in fact rough parity exists."<sup>6</sup>

Such obvious parallels with both of the previous case studies make the "window of vulnerability" a fitting capstone to this examination of efforts to set the national agenda in such a manner as to build consensus in support of responses to perceived threats to the United States from the Soviet Union. As this final study will show, the

parallels between these cases extend beyond a similarity in subject matter. The process by which the "window of vulnerability" became an issue for national debate, as was the case in the debates over the policies of NSC-68 and the "missile gap," began with the emergence of conflicting interpretations of the nature of the Soviet threat which led to conflict over the government, media, and public agendas. Efforts to resolve this conflict, especially in its manifestation within the government between the executive and legislative branches, led to the creation of special investigative commissions. Their findings, as had been the case in the two previous examples, ultimately became ammunition in an intense campaign waged through the mass media to win public support for defense programs designed to reduce the perceived Soviet threat.

It was in anticipation of precisely this campaign that Eugene Rostow, one of the founders of a renewed Committee on the Present Danger which became a central player in the debate over the "window of vulnerability," wrote in 1976 that:

We have faith in the maturity, good sense and fortitude of our people. But public opinion must be informed before it can reach considered judgments and make them effective in our democratic system. Time, weariness, and the tragic experience of Vietnam have weakened the bipartisan consensus which sustained our foreign policy between 1940 and the mid-60s. We must build a fresh consensus to expand the

opportunities and diminish the dangers of a world  
in flux.<sup>7</sup>

Rostow's appeal to the role of informed public opinion in arriving at considered judgments in the "democratic system," reflecting as it does the continuation of similar appeals associated with both NSC-68 and the missile gap era, serves as yet another example of the linkage between these three cases. However, the context in which he sets his appeal also highlights one of the most striking distinctions between the window of vulnerability and its predecessors. The debate over the "window" occurred following a period during which many people professed to believe that the previously existing consensus supporting the American foreign policy of containing the Soviet Union had broken down. While Rostow cited "time, weariness, and the tragic experience of Vietnam" as causes for this breakdown, other observers included the loss of public trust in the Presidency which resulted from the experience of Watergate. Time magazine, for example, in an essay written in July of 1974, predicted that "when Watergate is behind us...the press will have to help rebuild an American consensus, a new agreement as to the country's meaning and goals."<sup>8</sup> In addition, a number of critics and supporters of the policies of detente saw the lessening of tensions with the Soviet Union as contributing directly to growing confusion over the goals of American

foreign policy. As one scholar described it, "the relaxation of the most extreme perceptions of the Soviet Union that followed inevitably from detente" was almost certain to have such an effect, since "without a sharply negative view of an enemy, it is difficult to justify an activist foreign policy."<sup>9</sup>

Simultaneously with the growth of this perception that the consensus behind American foreign policy had been lost, charges arose that changes in the manner in which the mass media were covering the government were making it more difficult, if not impossible, for the country's elected leaders to construct a new consensus. Hamilton Jordan's views that this phenomenon had a decidedly negative impact on the ability of President Carter to build public support for his policies have already been cited.<sup>10</sup> But such opinions were not limited to those in government service. Michael J. O'Neill, editor of the New York Daily News and, at the time, the president of the American Society of Newspaper Editors, delivered a speech to the Society in May 1982 in which he charged that "the press has become so adversarial in its relationship with the government that it threatens the democratic process." According to O'Neill:

With Vietnam and Watergate...the media's relations with government have taken a sharp turn for the worse. The government has become the enemy.... [E]very policy initiative, every action, has to run a gauntlet of criticism that

is often generated - and always amplified - by the press. In this whirling centrifuge of criticism and controversy, authority is dissipated. Officials are undermined and demoralized. The capacity to govern, already drastically reduced...is weakened still further.

Given such views about the collapse of the American consensus on foreign policy and, apparently, of the associated collapse of the means necessary to rebuild it, what is perhaps the most striking finding of this study of the debate concerning American strategic vulnerability during the Carter and Reagan administrations is the fact that the process involved in agenda setting and consensus building is so similar to the process described in the previous two cases. While government and media spokesmen may have talked as if the relationships among the government, media, and the public had been radically altered as a result of the experiences of Vietnam and Watergate, they did not behave as if this was the case. In fact, a strong sense of "deja vu" seems to permeate the details which emerge throughout the following study of the opening and closing of the window of vulnerability.

There are, still, some significant differences between the window of vulnerability and its predecessors. Among the most obvious is the manner in which the debate about the perception of a growing Soviet threat was opened. Unlike the debate involving NSC-68, which sprang from the

concern which followed the testing of the first Soviet atomic bomb, and that over the "missile gap" which followed the launching of Sputnik, there was no single dramatic event which forced the concept of American strategic vulnerability in the late 1970s and early 1980s onto the public consciousness. As a result, the concept of a "window" was slow to emerge on the public and media agendas.

The origin of the term itself is in fact obscure. One source observes that "the phrase 'window of vulnerability' appears to have been coined by a Pentagon analyst about 1978."<sup>12</sup> Strobe Talbott attributes it to a statement by General Edward Rowney, who, after having served as the representative of the Joint Chiefs of Staff on the SALT II delegation, resigned at the time of its signing to work against its ratification.<sup>13</sup> The first use of the term in a public statement seems to have come just three days after Rowney resigned, when Army Chief of Staff General Bernard C. Rogers was quoted in a 16 June 1979 New York Times article as fearing that "the United States would fall behind the Soviet Union in strategic capabilities in the early 1980s" at which time American military planners would face "a critical window...in which the United States is open, or vulnerable, to attack."<sup>14</sup>

By the end of the year, the New York Times reported that the term was in general use by "military planners" as a description of "the period in which Soviet military strength...will be superior to the United States."<sup>15</sup> Still, it was not the military, but Presidential candidate Ronald Reagan who was most responsible for raising the term "window of vulnerability" to the level of general public awareness in the course of the 1980 election campaign.<sup>16</sup> By the time Reagan took office, most people were familiar with the phrase, but there is considerable evidence that even then not everyone was sure of exactly what it meant. On October 2, 1981, the President used a press conference concerning his decision on deploying the MX ICBM to reiterate his claim that "a window of vulnerability is opening, one that would jeopardize not just our hopes for serious productive arms talks, but our hopes for peace and freedom." The response of one reporter is illuminating. "Mr. President," he asked, "what exactly is this window of vulnerability?"<sup>17</sup>

President Reagan's reaction to the question, after a brief discussion concerning whether the window represented a current or a future threat, was to concede that "I don't know but what maybe you haven't gotten over into the area that I'm going to turn over to the Secretary of Defense."<sup>18</sup> Secretary Weinberger, in fact, was well prepared to address

the issue. Four days later he provided testimony to the Congress in which he explained the concept in these terms:

The "window of vulnerability," which has been so variously defined recently, simply describes that period that will occur if we do nothing now to improve our own strategic strength. The "window" will be at its widest in the period 1985-86, because we have not modernized or strengthened our strategic force as we should have in the past, and because the Soviets have never slowed their modernization or strengthening of their strategic forces <sup>19</sup> since 1961. The momentum is now in their favor.

To Secretary Weinberger's explanation of the "when" and "why" of the window of vulnerability, the New York Times added its definition of "what" the projected vulnerability involved. In a side article to the transcript of the President's press conference, the Times observed that the "oft-repeated theme" of a window of vulnerability was "generally used to mean the time period in which American land-based missiles are believed to be vulnerable to a surprise Soviet attack."<sup>20</sup> The primary implication of this situation in which the Soviet Union would enjoy strategic superiority over the United States, according to defense analysts both within and outside of the government, was not so much the threat that the Russians would actually launch such a surprise attack, but that their ability to do so might be used as a form of nuclear blackmail to force America to back down in crisis situations, much as the Kremlin had backed down in the Cuban missile crisis.<sup>21</sup>

Hence strategic superiority would not be merely an abstract concept, but a usable tool in support of an aggressive Soviet foreign policy.

Such projections of the consequences of a Soviet drive for strategic superiority had their roots not in the rhetoric of the Reagan election campaign, but in a series of intelligence evaluations of Soviet military strengths and intentions conducted during the last year of the Ford administration. It was during this period that a team of outside consultants, led by Professor Richard Pipes of Harvard, was brought into the process of developing the annual C.I.A. National Intelligence Estimate of the Soviet Union, leading to what came to be known as the "Team-B" intelligence assessment. This assessment flatly projected that the Soviet Union was using the era of detente to achieve a position of strategic superiority over the United States.<sup>22</sup>

The impact of the Team-B intelligence assessment on the debate over the nature of the Soviet threat, according to the account by Alan Wolfe in The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Threat, "was to the 1970s what the Gaither Report had been to the 1950s."<sup>23</sup> It served to sharply focus what had emerged in the preceding year as a general feeling of unease about the state of America's strategic posture as it

related to that of the Soviet Union. As described in a subsequent Senate investigation of the process by which the Team-B assessment was developed, "in the broadest sense the National Intelligence Estimate - B Team episode derived from a growing concern over the U.S.S.R.'s steady increase in strategic weapons strength over the course of the past decade and disagreement within the U.S. intelligence community on the meaning of this growth."<sup>24</sup>

Evidence of such disagreements within the intelligence community began to emerge in public in 1975, when, during testimony in support of President Ford's defense budget for FY 1976, Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger criticized the current CIA estimate that Soviet defense spending exceeded that of the United States by 20% as being too low.<sup>25</sup> Once he had departed from the Ford administration in November of 1975, Schlesinger continued to express his concern in statements to the mass media, generating headline coverage such as that in the 22 December 1975 edition of U.S. News and World Report, which proclaimed "Schlesinger sees U.S. heading for disaster."<sup>26</sup> Other voices joined his in claiming that existing intelligence analyses were failing to adequately describe the extent of the Soviet build-up, including those of General George Keegan, head of Air Force Intelligence, and General Daniel Graham, who had himself spent several years working in the

CIA's Office of National Estimates.<sup>27</sup> Reflecting such views, the December 1975 issue of the Saturday Evening Post featured an article which proclaimed: "It's Later Than You Think: A New Missile Gap!"<sup>28</sup>

Such public concerns were, during this same period, being expressed privately by members of the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board (PFIAB). As chartered by Executive Order 11460, the PFIAB was given a mandate to "conduct a continuing review of foreign intelligence...report to the President concerning [its] findings...and make appropriate recommendations for actions to achieve increased effectiveness in meeting national intelligence needs."<sup>29</sup> By the summer of 1975, the PFIAB, under the chairmanship of retired Admiral George W. Anderson, Jr., had reached the conclusion that recent National Intelligence Estimates (NIEs) "had been underestimating the progress of Soviet strategic weapons."<sup>30</sup> As a direct result of their findings, in August 1975 Chairman Anderson wrote to President Ford to urge that he authorize the National Security Council to implement a "competitive analysis" in which experts from outside the government would be given access to the same classified information as CIA analysts to see if the two groups would arrive at the same conclusions concerning Soviet strength and intentions.<sup>31</sup>

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MOVING DEMOCRACY TO ACTION: AGENDA SETTING AND  
CONSENSUS BUILDING IN DEVE. (U) AIR FORCE INST OF TECH  
WRIGHT-PATTERSON AFB OH S N DREW MAY 86

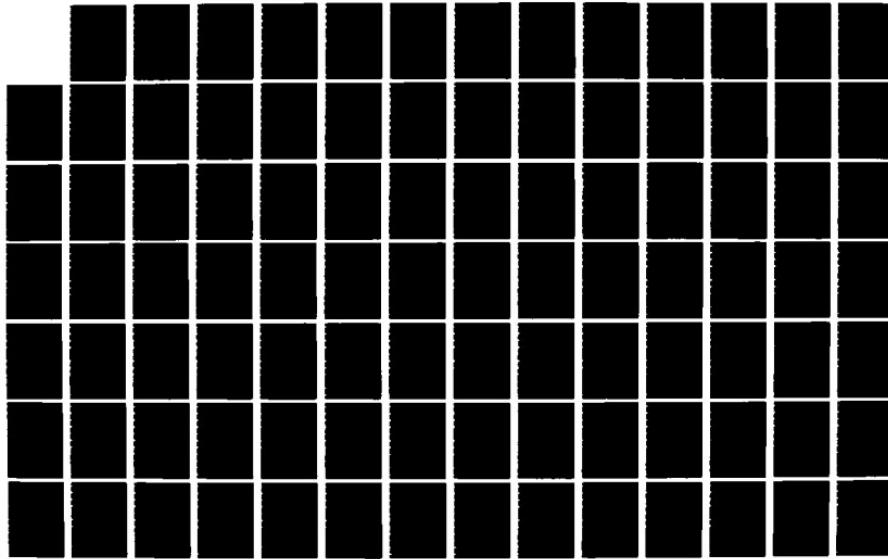
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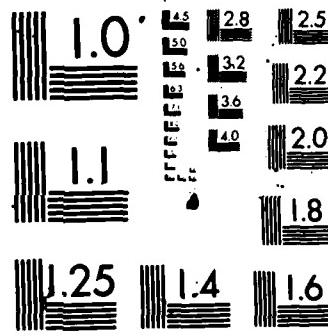
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MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART  
NATIONAL BUREAU OF STANDARDS-1963-A

The PFIAB's recommendations were not immediately adopted. The CIA had just implemented a thorough revision of the process by which its NIEs were drafted, and director William Colby obtained the President's consent to wait until at least one NIE on the Soviet Union was completed under the new system before deciding on the need for a "second opinion."<sup>32</sup> The new NIE was due out in the spring of 1976. However, before it could be completed, the CIA produced a separate study on Soviet military spending levels which appeared to substantiate the charges James Schlesinger had made in 1975. Completed in early February 1976, the new study revised the CIA estimate of Soviet defense spending upward from a level 20% greater than U.S. spending to 40% greater, reflecting a shift in intelligence accounting which meant that instead of the previously assumed 6-8% of their GNP, the Soviets were spending as much as 10-15% of their GNP on military forces.<sup>33</sup>

The CIA estimates, which quickly became public knowledge in the course of the debate in the Congress over the U.S. defense budget, did not reflect any increase in Soviet military capability. As intelligence analysts and new CIA chief George Bush were quick to point out, the primary implications of the new figures were that the Soviet military was less efficient and more costly than had been

previously thought.<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, as the report of the CIA's revised estimate which appeared in the 23 February 1976 New York Times observed, there was a more ominous tinge to the findings. According to the Times' article, unnamed "defense officials" suggested that "the higher estimate provided a deeper insight into the high priority Soviet leaders were willing to assign to defense, despite the strains that it imposes on the Soviet economy."<sup>35</sup>

As news of the CIA's report spread through the popular mass media, it was this more ominous cast which was most heavily reported. U.S. News and World Report, for example, saw the new assessment as pointing out areas "Where Russia is Outstripping [the] U.S. in Military Might."<sup>36</sup> Newsweek reported on the new "Soviet Surge," and coupled that to an article which asked "Is America Number Two?"<sup>37</sup> One week later, it was Time which featured an article describing "That Alarming Soviet Build-up."<sup>38</sup>

It was in this atmosphere that the PFIAB, now under the chairmanship of Leo Cherne, met to consider the new NIE on the Soviet Union which came out in April 1976.<sup>39</sup> According to subsequent accounts of their review, the Board members continued to be concerned by their perceptions that "when the Soviet Union was trying to catch up with us in strategic weapons, it was assumed in the NIE that they were

merely seeking parity.... At no point was the idea seriously contemplated by the framers of these estimates that perhaps the Russians were not struggling just for parity but hoping to go beyond it.<sup>40</sup> Leo Cherne, in particular, saw a need to state the nature of the Soviet threat in far sharper terms than what he read in the NIE. "We are in the midst of a crisis of belief," he observed, "and a crisis of belief can be resolved only by....mortal danger, shock, massive understandable challenge."<sup>41</sup> By the end of April, the PFIAB had again requested that a competitive analysis be used for the next NIE on the Soviet Union, and this time CIA director George Bush agreed.

The ground rules for the use of the outside consultants were set up during consultations between George Bush and the National Security Council staff. By the end of June, they had decided that there should be three "outside" teams: two would be technical groups, looking at specific questions concerning missile accuracy and bomber penetration; the third would have a broader charter, to conduct a "general review of whether the evidence cited in the national estimate would sustain conclusions other than those contained in the NIE."<sup>42</sup> Together, these groups would constitute the "B-Team," whose analyses would be contrasted to an "A-Team" composed of regular CIA analysts. The teams were to have access to all of the same information, but

would work and arrive at their conclusions independently. Once they had drafted their reports, the A and B Teams were to meet with their counterparts and compare their findings, with the results of these meetings then to be incorporated into a final assessment for the NIE.<sup>43</sup>

Controversy erupted almost at once, however, over the makeup of the B-Team membership. As the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence later complained, "the exercise had been so structured by the PFIAB and the Director of Central Intelligence that the B-Team on Soviet objectives reflected the views of only one segment of the spectrum of opinion."<sup>44</sup> The New York Times, in an editorial entitled "Handicapping the Arms Race," reflected a similar viewpoint. "For reasons that have yet to be explained," the column lamented, "the CIA's leading analysts were persuaded to admit a hand-picked, unofficial panel of hard line critics of recent arms control policy to sit at their elbows and influence the estimates of future Soviet military capabilities in a 'somber' direction."<sup>45</sup> Aside from the obvious inaccuracy in referring to the B-Team as an "unofficial panel," the Times' editorial was not far off the mark in its assessment of the group's make-up or intentions. The CIA Director, the chairman of the PFIAB, and the NSC staff working on developing the competitive analysis approach reportedly all agreed that "the B-Team

would be composed of conservative critics who opposed [what they believed was] CIA's 'arms control bias.'"<sup>46</sup> That such was the case was further reinforced by Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan's dissent from the report of the Intelligence Committee's investigation of the B-Team episode. As the Senator from New York expressed it:

Given the B-Team's purpose, it is hardly surprising that its members' views reflected "only one segment of the spectrum of opinion." Inasmuch as the main purpose of the experiment was to determine why previous estimates had produced such misleading pictures of Soviet strategic developments, it was reasonable to pick Team members whose views of Soviet strategy differed from those of the official estimators, just as a similar experiment, had one been conducted in 1962, might have called for a "B-Team" composed of strategic analysts who had been skeptical of the "missile gap."<sup>47</sup>

The group of outside analysts which inspired this debate was led by Richard E. Pipes, professor of Russian history at Harvard University, who also was in charge of the team assigned to assess the broader implications of Soviet intentions. Both Generals Daniel Graham and George Keegan, whose criticisms of the earlier CIA estimates already had been aired publicly, were assigned to the B-Team: Graham as the representative of the military Intelligence Community Staff; and Keegan in his capacity as chief of Air Force Intelligence. A third active duty military officer, Major General Jasper A. Welch, Jr., was chosen as a result of his expertise as head of the Air Force component dealing with

systems analysis and simulations. Two other analysts who had strong military backgrounds were members: retired General John Vogt, who had served as Air Force Chief of Staff; and RAND analyst Thomas Wolfe, who had been the air attache in Moscow during the period of the "bomber gap" in the mid 1950s. The panel further included two representatives of other government agencies: Paul Wolfowitz, from the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency; and Seymour Weis from the State Department. Rounding out the B-Team membership were Foy Kohler, Professor of International Studies at the University of Miami (Florida) and former ambassador to the Soviet Union; William R. Van Cleave, Professor of International Relations at the University of Southern California and a former SALT delegation member, and the ubiquitous Paul Nitze, whose work on NSC-68 and the Gaither Committee has been documented in the previous two studies.<sup>48</sup>

Richard Pipes, in an interview with Washington Post correspondent Murray Marder, defended the composition of his group by explaining that "there is no point in [including] another, what you might call, optimistic view. In general there has been a disposition in Washington to underestimate the Soviet drive. [Until now, this] moderately optimistic line has prevailed...."<sup>49</sup> Given this acknowledged predisposition on the part of the Team B

members to consider that the CIA analysts were "too optimistic" in their basic assessments of Soviet intentions and capabilities, it is not surprising to find that participants in the competitive analysis sessions described the meetings between the two teams as "absolutely bloody discussions."<sup>50</sup> One analyst observed that in the course of their sessions, the Team B members accused the CIA of "dealing in faulty assumptions, faulty analysis, faulty use of intelligence and faulty exploitation of available intelligence."<sup>51</sup> "There was," a CIA source concluded, "a disagreement beyond the facts."<sup>52</sup>

The areas of broadest disagreement were associated with the analyses of Soviet ICBM capabilities and overall intentions. The debate over ICBMs focussed primarily upon the issue of Soviet warhead accuracies, with the Team B members arguing that "there was no evidence to support the CIA's position that Soviet ICBMs were any less accurate than U.S. ones."<sup>53</sup> The Team B analysis went further, and in fact projected that Russian missiles might soon become even more accurate than our own, and thus become capable of placing the entire U.S. land based Minuteman ICBM force at risk.<sup>54</sup> It was this assessment, coupled with a subsequent CIA re-assessment of the accuracies of the Soviet's SS-18 and SS-19 ICBMs, which provided the technical rationale upon which the "window of vulnerability" was founded.

It was, however, in the area of overall Soviet intentions that the Team B report went furthest in providing the expression of "mortal danger, shock, and massive understandable challenge" for which PFIAB chairman Leo Cherne had called. In reaching their conclusions, Pipes' group, like the Gaither Committee before them, had exceeded their charter, and gone beyond a critique of the NIE currently under consideration by the CIA. Instead, they prepared a scathing attack on the findings of NIEs from throughout the era of detente, designed to bolster their earlier claims that the CIA had been overly optimistic about Soviet force levels and intentions for nearly a decade. As Senator Malcolm Wallop (R-Wy) summarized their findings:

While the Soviets were beginning the biggest military build-up in history, the NIE's judged that they would not try to build as many missiles as we had. When the Soviets matched our number, the NIE's said they were unlikely to exceed it substantially; when they exceeded it substantially, the NIE's said they would not try for decisive superiority - the capability to fight and win a nuclear war. Only very recently have the NIE's admitted that possibility as an "elusive question."<sup>55</sup>

In the opinion of Pipes and his companions on the B-Team, this was not an "elusive question" but a demonstrable fact. It was this view which gained Pipes considerable public notoriety in the summer of 1977, when he published

it as an article in Commentary titled "Why the Soviet Union Thinks It Could Fight and Win a Nuclear War."<sup>56</sup> As he explained the B-Team position to the House Select Committee on Intelligence:

First of all, the Russians have concluded that in any future war, general war, nuclear weapons will be the decisive weapons.... They will decide the outcome of the war. From this they have deduced that he who strikes first is going to have a tremendous advantage and, in fact, win the war, for a very obvious reason, namely that given MIRV'ing [the use of Multiple Independently targeted Re-entry Vehicles], even under the ceilings established by SALT...and allowing 2 warheads per silo, one Soviet SS-18 can theoretically knock out 5 American Minuteman silos. Therefore, you really need, hypothetically, only 200 SS-18's to knock out the whole American Minuteman force, still leaving you another 100 of those SS-18 class, as well as the SS-19's and everything else you may have.<sup>57</sup>

The Team B assessment did not, as General Keegan subsequently claimed, shift the focus of the NIE on the Soviet strategic threat by "180 degrees," but it clearly had an impact. The two teams met with the PFIAB twice, on December 2 and 3, 1976, to debate their differences.<sup>58</sup> As a result of these confrontations, the PFIAB ordered the NIE redrafted to reflect some of the Team B conclusions. After three attempts, a final draft, with which both Pipes and Keegan expressed themselves to be "quite pleased," was submitted for approval on 21 December 1976 to the United States Intelligence Board (USIB), which is ultimately responsible for all NIEs.<sup>59</sup> The CIA officially described

the revised intelligence assessment as "more somber than any in over a decade," but off the record, one intelligence analyst expressed the opinion that "it was more than somber - it was very grim. It flatly states that the Soviet Union is seeking superiority over United States forces. The flat judgement that that is the aim of the Soviet Union is a majority view in the estimate. The questions begin on when they will achieve it."<sup>60</sup>

Within five days after the report was submitted to the USIB, the thrust of the supposedly "top secret" estimate had been leaked to the press and was front page news in the New York Times. Headlines on December 26 proclaimed: "New CIA Estimate Finds Soviet Seeks Superiority in Arms; Intelligence Analysis Grim; Somber Assessments Are Attributed to Outside Advisors Brought Into Study For First Time."<sup>61</sup> ABC news featured the story in a year-end wrap up on December 30, again focusing on the Soviet drive for superiority.<sup>62</sup> The Washington Post ran its version of the Team-B episode on January 2, 1977, tying it to the upcoming inauguration with the headline: "Carter to Inherit Intense Dispute on Soviet Intentions."<sup>63</sup> By mid-January 1977, the hemorrhaging was complete, with details of both the findings and the process behind them described in Newsweek and U.S. News and World Report articles on "Russia's Relentless Arms Build-up" and "Russian Bear Redux? Richard

Pipes' Committee Report."<sup>64</sup>

The Senate Committee which investigated the Team-B episode was unable to determine the source of the leaks about the report, but an analysis of the news stories themselves reveals that the leaks were massive, coming from members of both Team A and Team B, as well as from analysts and government officials who, while not actively participating in drafting the NIE, had been involved in the review process.<sup>65</sup> Those from within the intelligence community tended to stress the conflict-laden nature of the process, and the intense pressure felt by the CIA analysts in their meetings with the more prestigious B-Team members. On the other hand, information clearly attributed to members of the B-Team tends to focus more on the nature of the increasingly dangerous Soviet threat as they saw it. The resulting media coverage naturally served to highlight the "bloody infighting" and the "very grim" assessment of the Soviet threat which paralleled almost exactly the "somber" views of the Team B members. The Senate investigation of the leaks was thus led to conclude that not only was "the value of the A-B experiment...lessened by the fact that details concerning these highly classified questions leaked to the press," but that further damage was done by the fact that such details invariably "appeared in garbled and one-sided form."<sup>66</sup>

It was concern over this "garbled and one-sided" portrayal of the assessment which prompted Senator Gary Hart (D-Co) to lament that the entire public disclosure of the Team B findings appeared to represent "but one element in a series of leaks and other statements which have been aimed at fostering a 'worst case' view for the public of the Soviet threat. In turn, this view of the Soviet threat is used to justify new weapons systems."<sup>67</sup> Senator Hart's prediction of the probable use of this depiction of the Soviet threat was to prove quite accurate, as the "window of vulnerability" opened by the B-Team assessment became tied to the fate of the deployment of the MX "mobile" ICBM during the Carter and Reagan administrations. However, the main thrust of the Senator's conclusions could just as well have been written by those who supported Team B's somber appraisal of the Soviet threat. "We need better mechanisms," Senator Hart observed, "to create a more orderly and informed public debate about Soviet strength, objectives, and intentions."<sup>68</sup> As had been the case for both NSC-68 and the missile gap, over the next several years both sides in the debate over the "window of vulnerability" would echo this call for "informed public debate" as they invoked the values of the traditional democratic process in their attempts to sway the defense policies of the American government.

### Notes for Chapter 8

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1. Wicker, Tom. "MIRV and the Window," in the New York Times; 19 April 1983: p. 23.
  2. Ibid.
  3. Washington Post, 4 October 1981.
  4. Johnson, Robert. "Periods of Peril: The Window of Vulnerability and Other Myths," in Foreign Affairs; Spring 1983: pp. 950-970.
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  6. U.S. Senate. MX Missile Basing System and Related Issues; Hearings before the Committee on Armed Services; 98th Cong., 1st Session; April 18-May 3 1983; USGPO, Washington D.C.; 1983: p. 433.
  7. Rostow, Eugene. "Common Sense and the Common Danger," (Policy Statement of the Committee on the Present Danger, 11 Nov. 1976); Reprinted in Charles Tyroler II, ed., Alerting America: The Papers of the Committee on the Present Danger; Pergamon-Brassey's Publishers, McClean, Va.; 1984: p. 5.
  8. "Don't Love the Press, But Understand It," in Time; July 8 1974: p. 75.
  9. Wolfe, Alan. The Rise and Fall of the 'Soviet Threat': Domestic Sources of the Cold War Consensus; The Institute for Policy Studies, Washington D.C.; 1979: p. 25.
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35. NYT; 23 Feb 1976: p. 13.

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37. Newsweek; 1 March 1976: pp. 34-39.

38. Time; 8 March 1976: pp. 35-36.

39. For a full list of PFIAB members see Appendix IV. The board was abolished by President Carter in 1977, but reinstated by President Reagan.

40. U.S. House of Representatives. Soviet Strategic Forces; op. cit.: p. 6.

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42. Prados; op. cit.: p. 249.

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### 9. Agendas In Conflict:

#### Carter and the Committee on the Present Danger

By the time Jimmy Carter was sworn in as President of the United States, the debate over the possibility of American strategic vulnerability was clearly a public one. Moreover, much of the media coverage of that debate was focused on the implications of the Team-B findings for the new administration. The headline for the Washington Post's initial story on the competitive intelligence controversy was typical, observing that the new President was about to "inherit an intense dispute on Soviet intentions."<sup>1</sup> The same theme had been sounded earlier in the New York Times' coverage, which used as its lead the statement that "President-elect Carter will receive an intelligence estimate of long-range Soviet intentions next month that raises the question of whether the Russians are shifting their objectives from rough parity with United States military forces to superiority."<sup>2</sup>

It was obvious that the Team-B episode and the subsequent leaks concerning its findings had placed the issue of an alarming Soviet buildup squarely on the government and public agendas which the Carter administration would

inherit. Columnist Drew Middleton, concluding a series of articles on the key problems which would demand the immediate attention of the new President, cut to the heart of the implications of the new NIE in his assessment that "the global military situation that will confront Jimmy Carter as he takes office...differs significantly from that faced by any of his predecessors since 1945. The difference arises from the growth of Soviet military strength and the relative decline of American power over the past ten years."<sup>3</sup> The Washington Post was also quick to note that the issue had been placed on the governmental agenda in such a manner that the President would have to confront it head on. As the Post observed:

The new National Intelligence Estimate, plus the Pipes Report, plus the encouragement given to..."worst case" theorists on Soviet intentions inside the government, is regarded as a high barrier for the Carter Administration to overcome to carry out its own broader objectives for U.S.-Soviet nuclear arms control.... Even if the Carter Administration disagrees with the new National Intelligence Estimates on Soviet strategy, it cannot be readily rewritten. It will appear in...volumes that serve as a reference for policy-makers<sup>4</sup> across the top echelon of the government....

It soon became apparent that the Carter administration did indeed disagree with the new assessment. In an interview just two days after the story of the Team B intelligence evaluation leaked to the press, the President-elect, while accepting the evidence that there

had been a "substantial" growth in Soviet military power, rejected the conclusion that the United States was consequently facing a period of vulnerability. "We're still," he contended, "by far stronger than they are in most means of measuring military strength."<sup>5</sup>

The concept of a Kremlin drive for usable military superiority in support of an aggressively hostile foreign policy, which lay at the heart of the Team B interpretation of Soviet motives, was clearly not compatible with the agenda desired by an administration seeking to downplay "that inordinate fear of Communism" which the President cited in his speech at Notre Dame University in May 1977.<sup>6</sup> Carter had pledged in his election campaign to emphasize efforts at arms control with the Soviet Union, and to cut between \$5 and \$7 billion from the annual military budget.<sup>7</sup> It is not surprising, therefore, to find that accounts of the first few months of the Carter Presidency observe that "the new administration did all it could to put the B-Team episode behind it."<sup>8</sup>

At his very first informal meeting of the National Security Council, on January 5 1977, the President ordered a new net assessment on the overall Soviet-U.S. force posture, designed in part to supersede the assessment of the just completed NIE.<sup>9</sup> In March 1977, the President

abolished the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, which had been the driving force behind the Team-B episode from the outset.<sup>10</sup> Yet the issues placed on the national agenda by the Team B intelligence assessment refused to go away.

In fact, as a Senate panel observed at the end of President Carter's first year in office, the B-Team position "that the Soviets intend to surpass the United States in strategic arms and are in the process of doing so has gone from heresy to respectability, if not orthodoxy."<sup>11</sup> Even the National Security Council net assessment ordered by the President failed to provide evidence which could be used to firmly refute the Team B position. Instead, the report submitted to the President in the summer of 1977, in the form of Presidential Review Memorandum 10, contained, in the words of National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski, "mixed conclusions" which only served to highlight "a sharp dispute within the Administration" about actual Soviet intentions and the appropriate American response.<sup>12</sup>

Presidential Review Memorandum 10 was the product of a five month interagency study directed by Harvard's Samuel Huntington.<sup>13</sup> In an obvious parallel with NSC-68, the Washington Post reported that several of the panel members

working on early drafts of the study had stated privately that "they hoped to create a document that would scare the Carter Administration into greater respect for the Soviet menace."<sup>14</sup> Unlike the formulators of NSC-68, however, Huntington's group was not able to forge a consensus among the agencies working on the new net assessment concerning the immediacy or extent of the threat. Instead, the final document was ultimately divided into two parts: a "Comprehensive Net Assessment," which reflected a generally pessimistic appraisal of the growing imbalance between American and Soviet military strength; and a "Military Force Posture Review," which concluded that a relatively modest American military effort should be sufficient to maintain the balance of power.<sup>15</sup>

Brzezinski and Defense Secretary Harold Brown saw within the Memorandum's expression of "urgent apprehension" over what were described as "great strides" in Soviet military programs a call for "a deliberate decision to reverse the military trends of the preceding decade."<sup>16</sup> This led them to argue in favor of linking a continuation of the policies of detente and negotiations on SALT II with a buildup of American strategic forces, and in particular with the deployment of the new MX ICBM as a follow-on to our Minuteman system.<sup>17</sup> Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, on the other hand, recalls that he "disagreed emphatically" with

this interpretation. Concerned with what he saw as "the growing polarization of U.S.-Soviet relations, Vance saw in the report evidence which supported his contention that "our security policies and programs were sound. Politically and economically we were much stronger than the Soviet Union; militarily we were at least equal."<sup>18</sup> As a result, rather than consolidating the administration's position on strategic policy toward the Soviet Union, Presidential Review Memorandum 10 merely served to add fuel to the ongoing debate.

Unable to remove concerns about the Soviet buildup and its implications for American policy from the internal agenda of his own administration, President Carter was also faced with a major effort by groups outside of the government to keep the issue of a growing Soviet threat in front of the people. One such group is worthy of special attention, not so much because of any major success in taking its case to the public, but because of the unique role its members played in forging links between the governmental and public agendas concerning the emergence of the issue of "vulnerability." That group was the newly re-formed Committee on the Present Danger, which, when it announced its creation on Veteran's Day, 1976, numbered among its list of charter members no fewer than five out of the sixteen members of the PFIAB, and four of the seven

non-governmental members of Team B itself, including its head, Richard Pipes.<sup>19</sup>

According to the Committee's own literature, the "intellectual basis for the Committee" was a direct outgrowth of Pipes' B Team's conclusion that "the CIA had consistently underestimated the massive Soviet military effort."<sup>20</sup> In fact, the birth of the revived Committee on the Present Danger predates the creation of the B-Team, but the intellectual ties are clearly present.

Unlike the original Committee on the Present Danger, the 1976 edition was not formed in response to a need by the government to get its agenda across to the public, but instead grew out of a sense of need to change both the government and public agendas. On March 12, 1976, former Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs Eugene Rostow called together a group of leaders from the academic, business, and governmental communities who, in discussions held over the previous months, had indicated to him their shared belief that there was a need "to alert American policy makers and opinion leaders and the public at large to the ominous Soviet military buildup and its implications, and to the unfavorable trends in the U.S.-Soviet military balance."<sup>21</sup> James R. Schlesinger, who had encouraged the formation of such a group while serving

as Secretary of Defense, was present at the gathering, as were two individuals who had provided administration encouragement for the formation of the first Committee on the Present Danger: Paul Nitze, who had been instrumental in drafting NSC-68; and Charles Tyroler, who had served as Director of Manpower Supply in the Defense Department under George Marshall.<sup>22</sup> All together, the twelve men who met at the Metropolitan Club in Washington that day included individuals who had served either in or as consultants to every administration since the end of the Second World War.<sup>23</sup> This composition was not coincidental. As the group decided at that meeting, the committee they sought to create:

...would be bipartisan, with liberals and conservatives, but the principal qualification for membership would be expertise and experience in the areas of foreign and defense policy. Thus, we would concentrate on inviting persons who had held top positions in State, Defense, and Treasury, as well as senior figures in appropriate departments at leading universities around the country. What we were striving for was credibility - the essential ingredient in the process of persuasion.<sup>24</sup>

The group met ten times throughout the summer and early fall of 1976, during which time they drafted and completed 13 revisions of their first formal attempt at the "process of persuasion," a document entitled "Common Sense and the Common Danger."<sup>25</sup> This paper became the formal policy statement of the Committee on the Present Danger. It

expressed the consensus of the Committee's membership, which grew as the year progressed, that "the principal threat to our nation, to world peace, and to the cause of human freedom is the Soviet drive for dominance based upon an unparalleled military buildup," which, if unchecked, would "destroy the world balance of forces on which the survival of freedom depends."<sup>26</sup> This was clearly the same view of the threat as expressed in the Team B intelligence assessment, and not surprisingly, given the involvement of Paul Nitze in the Committee's early efforts, it also bears a striking resemblance to the concerns expressed in NSC-68 in 1950. However, the Committee feared that in 1976 this threat was "more subtle and indirect than was once the case," and that "as a result, awareness of the danger has diminished in the United States."<sup>27</sup>

The Committee members set themselves the task of raising this level of awareness. The stakes as they perceived them were of the highest order. "If we continue to drift," they believed, "we shall become second best to the Soviet Union in overall military strength.... We could find ourselves isolated in a hostile world, facing the unremitting pressures of Soviet policy backed by an overwhelming preponderance of power. Our national survival itself would be in peril, and we should face, one after another, bitter choices between war and acquiescence under pressure."<sup>28</sup> It

was precisely this threat which later came to be associated with the label of the "window of vulnerability." To avoid being confronted with such a situation, the Committee on the Present Danger felt that it would be necessary to take "decisive steps...to alert the nation and to change the course of its policy."<sup>29</sup>

The first of those "decisive steps to alert the nation" came on 11 November 1976, when the Committee opened its initial press conference with the proclamation that "our country is in a period of danger, and the danger is increasing."<sup>30</sup> This press conference represented the culmination of an intensive effort by the Committee to begin its operations by generating a solid relationship with the mass media. Having been chosen as the Committee's first Director, Charles Tyroler II prepared a set of guidelines for the group in early September which established that "our basic operational task is to further the two-way process of communications here at home on foreign and national security policy matters. To this end.... we will avail ourselves, to the maximum extent consistent with our time and resources, of all media of communication for the exposition and consideration of our findings."<sup>31</sup>

After having postponed the official announcement of the

Committee's formation until two days after the election to avoid the prospect of the news being buried by the weight of coverage naturally devoted to the Presidential campaign, Tyroler's efforts appeared ready to bear fruit.<sup>32</sup> Over 100 reporters were present at the National Press Club room where the Committee presented "Common Sense and the Common Danger" to the public for the first time. All of the major broadcast networks and the wire services were represented, as were most of the major newspapers in the country. The press conference, which included an extensive question and answer session, lasted for over 90 minutes. The stage was set for an intensive media barrage over the next several days which the Committee members hoped would generate sufficient public pressure to insure that their views were reflected in the defense and foreign policy appointments of the new Carter administration.<sup>33</sup> As one subsequent account described it, "by going public with their message, the Committee on the Present Danger had thrown down the gauntlet.... The second 'Great Debate' had begun."<sup>34</sup>

The "gauntlet," however, was not picked up by the mass media. There was, in fact, a dramatic lack of immediate news coverage. As one of the Committee's founding members described it:

We anxiously awaited the results, [but] that night not a word appeared on TV or radio. Not a line appeared in the Washington Evening Star. The

next morning, not a line appeared in the Washington Post or the New York Times. All of us found it hard to conceal our disappointment. Associated Press, UPI and other wire services sent out substantial stories, versions of which appeared in scores of newspapers across the country, but taking their lead from the top Eastern papers, they did not accord it prominent or substantial space. Thus the committee's message was slow in reaching the public. It wasn't until two months later that a brief excerpt from our initial policy statement appeared in the New York Times.<sup>35</sup>

Even that belated coverage did not come as a news article, but appeared instead as part of an "op ed" column by Committee founder Eugene Rostow. The same pattern prevailed within the broadcast media. There is no record of any network newscast mentioning the Committee on the Present Danger prior to January 1977, when Howard K. Smith of ABC used portions of the Committee's policy statement concerning the danger of the Soviet military buildup in a "commentary" segment to support his contention that "Americans must get scared soon, or it will be too late."<sup>36</sup> In general, through the first several months of its existence, the Committee's message reached the public, if at all, through such opinion columns and broadcasts, letters to the editor, and occasional interviews with prominent Committee members such as Paul Nitze, Eugene Rostow, and Richard Pipes who were newsworthy as a result of some activity other than their Committee association.<sup>37</sup>

The inability of the Committee on the Present Danger to

generate substantial news coverage for its activities stands in sharp contrast to the amount of coverage afforded its earlier incarnation in the 1950s. A number of observers, both supportive and critical of the Committee's positions, attempted to account for this phenomenon in the manner reflected by former Los Angeles Times correspondent Robert Scheer's assertion that "the Committee had been dismissed by most of the political and media establishment as extremist critics of detente and arms control."<sup>38</sup> Such implied media bias, however, would not account for the fact that during this same period, the views of Pipes' Team B group, which were virtually identical to the Committee on the Present Danger's views, and in fact involved several of the Committee's members, were given extensive media coverage. The key distinction is that, as members of Team B, these individuals spoke with the weight of the Ford administration, or at least appeared to enjoy the support of influential members of that administration. This situation became even more pronounced when, on January 7, 1977, George Bush formally endorsed the NIE upon which Team B had worked.<sup>39</sup> They thus became part of a debate over the setting of the internal governmental agenda, and hence were intrinsically newsworthy. Likewise, the members of the original Committee on the Present Danger had spoken in support of an agenda being actively pushed by the Truman

administration, and the news coverage they received reflected their role as allies of the executive branch in its struggle to gain Congressional support for that agenda.

The 1976 edition of the Committee on the Present Danger, however, enjoyed no such relationship with the incoming Carter administration, which, as has been noted above, came into office attempting to downplay the vision of the Soviet threat which was at the core of the Committee's agenda. Efforts to establish ties with the new administration which might have elevated the news value of the Committee's statements met with predictable failure. Out of 53 names submitted by the Committee on the Present Danger for consideration as prospective Carter administration appointees in the field of foreign affairs and national security, not one was selected.<sup>40</sup> When Eugene Rostow reacted to the President's rejection of all of the Committee's proposed nominees by observing that "on Carter's appointments, my views are unprintable," he was right in more ways than one.<sup>41</sup> The Committee had correctly identified credibility as "the essential ingredient in the process of persuasion." Without the added credibility of ties to the agenda setting process of the new administration, the Committee on the Present Danger became, as the New York Times subsequently put it, "a voice crying

in the wilderness."<sup>42</sup>

It should be noted, however, that the Committee on the Present Danger was far from being alone in this wilderness. The list of recommended nominees which Carter rejected had been endorsed by several other groups which shared the Committee's belief that a stronger American defense effort was necessary, including the Coalition for a Democratic Majority, the American Security Council, and the National Strategy Information Center.<sup>43</sup> These organizations tended to overlap in membership, so it was natural for them to coordinate their attempts to bring pressure to bear in trying to influence the national agenda. As early as May 1976, for example, Frank R. Barnett, the head of the National Strategy Information Center, wrote to Eugene Rostow to urge him to join in a \$1,000,000 campaign to "crank up an all out effort to meet the current and growing threat from the Soviet Union" by establishing a staff to "tutor Congressional staffs and...generate more public information."<sup>44</sup> Rostow responded by inviting Barnett to join the emerging Committee on the Present Danger, and observed that "it should be no problem to coordinate our activities, and indeed to act jointly on many issues."<sup>45</sup>

This loose coalition of conservative organizations had joined in the effort to exert leverage on the formation of

the Carter administration's foreign policy establishment in part because of their shared conviction that, in the words of a Coalition for a Democratic Majority statement, "the will of the people cannot be mobilized unless the President and the Secretary of State address these issues with words and deeds adequate to their gravity."<sup>46</sup> Having failed to place a single voice within the administration who could help shape such words and deeds, it became obvious that an alternate strategy was called for. Taking their cue from Frank Barnett's earlier proposal to "tutor" Congressional staffs, the groups decided that since "the Administration is unapproachable...the only way to keep the debate alive and get some sensible resolution to it now is through the Congress."<sup>47</sup>

By February 1977, Congressional lobbying efforts by members of these groups were conspicuous enough to prompt Anthony Lewis, in a New York Times "op ed" column, to remark upon "the rise of a new militant coalition on national security issues.... symbolized by the recently formed Committee on the Present Danger."<sup>48</sup> What had impressed Lewis was the unsuccessful opposition of this "coalition on national security issues" to the appointment of Paul Warnke as head of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency. Far more impressive however, at least in terms of its immediate impact on the public agenda, was the August

1978 creation of the Coalition For Peace Through Strength, an organization composed of 148 members of Congress who called for the United States "to achieve military superiority over the Soviet Union."<sup>49</sup>

Chaired by Senators Robert Dole (R-Kan) and Paul Laxalt (R-Nev), the Congressional group included members of both houses and both major political parties. Its creation was the culmination of the focus on Congress which had been adopted by the "militant coalition" of groups concerned with national security issues described by Lewis. In fact, the press conference announcing the establishment of the new group was organized and run by American Security Council president John Fisher.<sup>50</sup> Unlike the press conference announcing the creation of the Committee on the Present Danger, this one generated immediate front page coverage in the New York Times: further testimony, if any is needed, to the importance of governmental actors in getting an item placed on the agenda of the mass media.<sup>51</sup>

In order to sharpen the impact of Coalition For Peace Through Strength's message on the media and public agendas, an auxiliary arm of the new organization was also established, with the express purpose of using the prestige of its Congressional ties to support a broad public educational campaign. This group was under the joint

chairmanship of former Team B members Daniel Graham, George Keegan, and William Van Cleave (who was also a member of the Committee on the Present Danger). It coordinated public and media appearances by Congressional members of the Coalition For Peace Through Strength, and served as the primary liaison between the group's core of Congressional members and other regionally and nationally based groups sharing similar objectives, such as the Committee on the Present Danger.<sup>52</sup>

As Senator Paul Laxalt described it, the public campaign sponsored by his Congressional organization "is what this coalition is all about. We've gathered together some of the most prestigious names and groups in the defense community to build a formidable organization dedicated to the adoption of a national strategy for peace through strength."<sup>53</sup> Over the course of the next year, the broad coalition of groups acting in concert with the Coalition For Peace Through Strength was able to keep the argument that the United States was in danger of "becoming number two" in front of the public through media coverage of Congressional statements, hearings, and debates. During this period, the Committee on the Present Danger alone reported that its members testified before Congressional committees 17 times, appeared in 479 radio and television broadcasts, press conferences, debates, briefings and

educational conferences, and distributed over 200,000 copies of the Committee's pamphlets and reports.<sup>54</sup>

As the Congressional debate over the Carter administration's proposals for SALT II heated up throughout the latter part of 1978 and all of 1979, not a month went by that the issue of the strategic balance was not part of a major news story.<sup>55</sup> The groups associated with the Committee on the Present Danger seized upon the SALT II debate as a focal point for their campaign to convince the public that the Soviets had used the period of detente and SALT I to outstrip the United States in military might. Urging either the rejection of SALT II or a massive American military buildup as a prerequisite to treaty ratification, they coupled their media campaign with tactics successfully used by a number of political action committees. Telephone banks and direct mailing campaigns were used to reach an estimated total of over 15 million people, and films such as the American Security Council's half hour "The Price of Peace and Freedom" were distributed to over 1200 groups and shown on approximately 200 local television stations throughout the country.<sup>56</sup> By September 1979, Leslie Gelb, a former Director of the Bureau of Political-Military Affairs for the State Department, felt compelled to use his column in the New York Times to decry the rise of "a climate of near hysteria about the Soviet

Union's military capability and international designs that has been created by right-wingers and abetted and magnified by the news media."<sup>57</sup>

That the effort was having an impact on heightening public perceptions of a growing Soviet threat is evident from opinion polling data from the period. During the last year of the Ford administration, Gallup polls reported that a plurality of those questioned favored a decrease in American military spending, with 36% favoring cuts while only 22% favored an increase, and 34% believed that the level of defense spending should remain as it was.<sup>58</sup> Four years later, the New York Times reported that "for the first time in twenty years of polling, a solid plurality felt that too little was being spent on the military."<sup>59</sup> This time, the results indicated 46% of those polled by Gallup favored an increase in military spending, while only 14% believed that too much was already being spent on defense and 23% thought that the level of defense spending was adequate.<sup>60</sup> The article noted that the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan had obviously had an impact on the findings, but pointed out that public opinion had been "moving that way since at least 1976."<sup>61</sup> This conclusion is at least partially supported by a June 1979 poll which provided evidence that "a solid plurality of Americans believe that the United States has fallen behind the Soviet Union

militarily."<sup>62</sup> Using data from a New York Times-CBS poll which showed 43% of those surveyed perceiving the USSR to be stronger than the U.S., with 11% believing the United States to be ahead and 30% believing the two sides to be roughly equal, Hedrick Smith concluded that "critics of [Carter's] military policy had been persuasive with their contention that the United States had allowed the Soviet Union to take the lead in the arms race."<sup>63</sup>

The degree to which such groups operating outside of the administration were given credit for having such an impact on the national agenda provides telling evidence of the corresponding lack of effectiveness on the part of the President in getting his priorities adopted by the media and the public. In part, this was a direct reflection of the splits revealed within the administration over what the President's agenda should be during the controversy over Presidential Review Memorandum 10. The fact that the President's top advisors on national security affairs could not agree among themselves about the nature of the Soviet threat made it almost inevitable that public statements by those advisors, and by the President himself, would tend to reveal what one observer described as a picture of "confusion surrounding the Carter Administration's attitude toward the Soviet Union."<sup>64</sup>

Perhaps the classic example of this depiction of an administration confused in its directions on Soviet policy came in President Carter's June 7, 1978 commencement address to the U.S. Naval Academy. The text of this speech, according to Secretary of State Vance, was the product of the President's attempts to "split the difference" between a "confrontational" draft prepared by National Security Advisor Brzezinski and a draft focusing on the need to "lower political tensions on a reciprocal basis" written by the Secretary of State. The end result, as Vance described it, was "a stitched-together speech," which, far from achieving its original goal of "combating the growing perception of an administration rent by internal divisions," instead "underlined...the image of an inconsistent and uncertain government."<sup>65</sup> The same perception could be generated equally well by comparing the President's commencement address to students at Notre Dame University in May 1977 with his address at Wake Forest University in March 1978. While the Notre Dame speech proclaimed an end to U.S. policies founded upon an "inordinate fear of communism," the address at Wake Forest appeared to be directed at precisely such a fear. "Over the past 20 years," the President proclaimed, "the military forces of the Soviet Union have grown both in absolute numbers and relative to our own.... These forces could be

used for political blackmail, and they could threaten our vital interests." Citing an "ominous inclination on the part of the Soviet Union to use its military power," President Carter went on to assert that "We will match any threatening power.... We will not allow any other nation to gain military superiority over us."<sup>66</sup>

The President was not alone in sending seemingly contradictory signals to the public concerning the government's perception of the Soviet threat. In the fall of 1977, while Secretary of Defense Harold Brown, in the midst of a campaign to win support in Congress for deployment of the new mobile MX missile, was suggesting that the Soviet Union might soon be strong enough to contemplate a disarming first strike against the United States,<sup>67</sup> Secretary of State Vance was testifying to Senate Committee on Foreign Relations that, in his belief, the Soviet Union was striving merely for "maintenance of rough equality or rough parity between the two nations."<sup>68</sup> In early February 1978, Brown was again citing "accelerating Soviet nuclear strength" which "in some areas surpass[es] that of the United States" in an effort to win support for full scale development of the MX and a \$56 billion increase in defense spending over a five year period.<sup>69</sup> Yet less than five months later, the Secretary of Defense delivered a speech in San Francisco in which he proclaimed that

"there should be less 'alarm' about the growth of Soviet military strength." Under headlines which announced that "Brown is Reassuring on U.S. Might," the New York Times reported that "the speech seemed aimed at several members of Congress, defense analysts, and retired military officers who assert that the Soviet Union is militarily outdistancing the United States" - an assertion Brown himself had made earlier in the year!<sup>70</sup>

Public opinion polls reflected general confusion over exactly what the administration was trying to do. A June 1978 New York Times-CBS survey found only 29% of the public approved the President's handling of foreign policy, but more importantly, revealed an amazing level of disagreement over what that foreign policy was attempting to accomplish. With a majority (53%) of the respondents saying that they favored a "get tough" attitude toward the Soviet Union, 35% indicated they believed that the President was following such a policy, while 41% felt that the President was instead attempting to "relax tensions."<sup>71</sup> Given such examples of the apparent contradictions and disarray in the administration's national security policy agenda, it is not surprising to find that by the mid-point in his term as President, questions were being raised in the press about Carter's "unwillingness - or inability - to exercise political leadership" in the field of

Soviet-American relations.<sup>72</sup> A viewpoint which came to be reflected with increasing frequency was sounded in a New York Times "op ed" column by Committee on the Present Danger member Norman Podhoretz just over one week after the results of the poll cited above were published:

If Mr. Carter were a true leader, he would be working toward the resolution of this conflict and the formation of a new consensus. Instead he appears content to go on representing a perfect embodiment of the<sup>73</sup> stalemate of the general climate of opinion.

President Carter's inability to bridge the obvious gap which existed between the perceptions of his Secretary of State and his National Security Advisor undoubtedly contributed to the perceptions which lay behind such critiques. Still, a careful examination of the evidence from the last half of his administration indicates that the President did move to provide the leadership which might have led to a "resolution of this conflict" in the course of his drive to obtain Senate ratification of the SALT II agreement. At the heart of the emerging administration agenda aimed at this goal was an unlikely linkage between the President's perception of the need for an arms limitation treaty and the growth of Congressional concern over the prospect that our Minuteman ICBM force might soon be vulnerable to a Soviet first strike. The key to both became the deployment of the MX mobile ICBM.

As early as December of 1978, a number of the President's advisors were reported to be recommending that he abandon his efforts at cutting defense spending if he wished to gain the necessary Senate support for SALT II. According to a New York Times article, Hamilton Jordan and Gerald Rafshoon were said to be convinced that "maintaining a reasonably high defense budget was...crucial to ease the concerns of Senators reluctant to support a possible strategic arms limitation accord with the Soviet Union."<sup>74</sup> Carter, whose commitment to SALT II was reflected strongly in his profession that he would "never have a chance so momentous to contribute to world peace as to negotiate and see ratified this SALT treaty," was susceptible to their suggestions.<sup>75</sup> Less than a week later he was telling the Democratic Party's mid-term conference that while he would like to hold down defense spending, "we cannot do it unilaterally by putting ourselves in a position of vulnerability vis a vis the Soviet Union." As a result, he insisted, he now "had to match the Soviet arms buildup."<sup>76</sup>

The administration's concern over finding itself in "a position of vulnerability" was heightened further in early 1979, when a new intelligence study of Soviet ICBM forces reported that "the Strategic Rocket Corps...had made dramatic and unexpected progress in upgrading the accuracy of their most lethal missiles."<sup>77</sup> According to information

made public in the New York Times, "the new study concluded that Moscow was acquiring forces that would enable it to fight a nuclear war, and that by the early 1980's the Soviet Union would be able in theory to knock out a large number of the United States' Minuteman missiles housed in underground silos."<sup>78</sup> In essence, the report appeared to confirm the "worst case" fears which had been attributed to the members of Team-B.<sup>79</sup>

By the first of April, the Times had made explicit the relationship between this unwelcome news and the fate of SALT II. In a two-part editorial column under the headline "Toward SALT: America the Vulnerable," the Times' editors in effect tied SALT, the MX, and the "window of vulnerability" concept into a single Gordian knot. The SALT treaty, they observed:

...will stand or fall not only on the provisions it contains, but also on feelings about the adequacy of American nuclear forces for the seven years of its proposed life. The debate about the adequacy of our defense turns largely on one issue: the potential vulnerability of our land-based Minuteman missiles.

By 1983, theoretically, a third of [the Russians new generation ICBM] force could destroy the bulk of America's 1000 Minutemen in their underground silos.... Such a first strike, it is argued, would leave the Soviet Union with overwhelming nuclear superiority, and raise doubts that an American President would dare to retaliate.... Indeed, foreseeing this...it is further argued, a President would feel outmaneuvered before any weapon was ever fired, and be forced, in a crisis, to make dangerous

concessions.<sup>80</sup>

The Times' column could well have been written by members of Team B or the Committee on the Present Danger. It went on to conclude that "this sense of approaching vulnerability is now widely shared by American strategic planners." The following day, the essay continued by observing that "the experts concur that another arms control agreement with the Soviet Union will be acceptable only if the administration undertakes a major improvement in our land based missiles. The question now is how to overcome the vulnerability without undermining further arms control."<sup>81</sup>

The administration's response to the question posed by the Times came in the form of a 7 June 1979 announcement that the President would endorse the deployment of the MX (for "Missile: eXperimental") multiple warhead mobile ICBM.<sup>82</sup> The concept behind the MX involved basing the new missile in such a manner as to allow it to move among several shelters, thus precluding the Soviet Union from knowing where it would be at any given time, and making it impossible to accurately target, given the limitations on the number of warheads each side could possess under the proposed SALT II limits. However, without those limits, it would be possible for the Russians to add new warheads for each shelter constructed more cheaply and quickly than the

shelters could be built.<sup>83</sup> Thus, without SALT II, the MX proposal no longer provided an answer to the issue of "vulnerability," and without the MX, the Carter administration believed there would be no SALT II.

Ironically, Carter had originally called the MX concept "the craziest idea I've ever heard of."<sup>84</sup> He expressed limited support for the MX program after taking office only as a bargaining chip for use in his "deep cuts" arms control proposal in March 1977, when he had hoped to induce the Soviets to reduce the number of their deployed heavy ICBMs from 300 to 150 in return for an American pledge not to deploy the MX.<sup>85</sup> Having been rebuffed by the Soviets in that attempt at an arms limitation treaty, he now found himself in the position of using MX as a bargaining chip with the Congress in order to gain support for SALT II. The announcement of his endorsement of the MX came as the administration was launching a massive drive to win support for the treaty in the Senate, and was immediately criticized by Senator John Tower (R-Tex) as an act of "transparent salesmanship meant to buy the ratification of the treaty."<sup>86</sup> Nevertheless, over the next several months this "salesmanship" appeared to be having the desired impact, as several key witnesses, including the members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, linked their testimony in behalf of the

SALT accord to the administration's willingness to continue to support an American strategic arms buildup.<sup>87</sup>

Such "salesmanship," however, did not prove sufficient to restore public confidence in the President's leadership or to bring a sense of order to the administration's national security agenda. In many respects, this was a logical consequence of the difficulties inherent in the overall effort to provide simultaneous justification for both a strategic buildup and an arms limitation agreement. As a column by Tom Wicker written in March of 1979 aptly pointed out, the administration's attempts to link SALT to the deployment of MX had the potential of "playing into the hands of SALT critics of both the Right and Left," and were thus "likely to confuse public opinion still further and raise new questions about Mr. Carter's judgement in negotiating the treaty."<sup>88</sup>

Adding still further to the potential for confusing public opinion was the pattern of Soviet rhetoric and behavior throughout the period of Carter's term in office. In a dramatic reversal of the situation which obtained in the 1950s, when Soviet propaganda did all it could to heighten the sense of a Russian threat to American security, the Kremlin's propaganda in the late 1970s was designed to minimize the American public's perception of

Soviet military strength and aggressive behavior. It was also a more sophisticated effort. As the New York Times observed in May 1977, after Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko had sharply rebuffed President Carter's "deep cuts" arms control proposal, "the thrust of Soviet bargaining has shifted to the arena of American public opinion - its target the malleable amalgam of views held by Government officials, the news media, and private experts. Only our side presents such targets."<sup>89</sup>

The Soviet propaganda campaign was clearly under way before Carter assumed office, as is evident in the comment by one East European diplomat shortly after the election (and just after the initial press conference of the Committee on the Present Danger) that the Kremlin hoped to press hard for progress on arms control "as a means of discouraging what [the Kremlin] pictured as the strengthening of rightist forces in the United States."<sup>90</sup> Following the publicity associated with the Team B report, Kremlin spokesman Georgi Arbatov made front page news in the New York Times with what was described as "the most detailed rebuttal to date of recent assertions in the West that Moscow was capturing a lead in the arms race."<sup>91</sup> The Soviet director of the Institute of U.S. and Canada Studies went on to proclaim that "the specter of a 'Soviet threat' was an invention of persons in the American military,

industrial, and intelligence communities who feared that the new administration would really take the road of reducing tensions and easing the arms race." The arms buildup in the USSR, he contended, "was aimed at catching, but not surpassing, the United States."<sup>92</sup> Not surprisingly, after President Carter's Wake Forest speech which seemed to invoke precisely that "specter of a 'Soviet threat,'" the Soviet news agency TASS accused the President of "virtually abandoning detente."<sup>93</sup>

While Soviet rhetoric attempted to play down any suggestion that the Kremlin's policies represented a threat to the United States, however, Soviet actions, especially in Africa and South Asia, tended to send a somewhat different message. Soviet global behavior during the late 1970s was clearly more aggressive than it had been during the late 1950s. The use of Russian forces or their Cuban surrogates in Angola and Ethiopia provided ample evidence for those who claimed that the growth of Soviet military power was liable to lead to more aggressive policies aimed at "world domination." The intensity of feeling about such behavior was strong enough within the U.S. Congress that Senator Frank Church (D-Idaho) was able to bring the Senate hearings on SALT II to a virtual standstill following what later proved to be erroneous reports that the Soviets had introduced a "combat brigade" into Cuba.<sup>94</sup>

It was, ultimately, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979 which finally served to solidify the general perception that concern over an aggressive Soviet military threat was a central item on both the administration and public agendas. In the aftermath of that invasion, the New York Times spoke of a "reversal" of the Carter administration's position on the Soviet threat and the need for increased military spending to counter it, as compared with his earlier commitment to reduce the military budget. The President's support of the MX, which, like his move toward increased military spending, actually predated the Soviet move into Afghanistan, was contrasted with his cancellation of the B-1 bomber program. These moves, said Times columnist Terence Smith, culminating with the decision to withdraw the SALT II treaty from Senate consideration, "seem to be a response to Soviet actions, and, no less, a recognition of the growing national demand to do something."<sup>95</sup> After three years, the administration, media, and public agendas on national security finally appeared to be in harmony.

At the same time, however, the collapse of the Carter administration's efforts to obtain ratification of a strategic arms limitation agreement with the Soviet Union left the President in an awkward position. In his drive to

gain Senate support for SALT II, he had been compelled to incorporate into his administration's agenda the rhetoric associated with Team B's prediction of a gap between American and Soviet strategic capabilities. His own agenda had sought to close that gap by combining SALT and MX. Yet without SALT II, the MX alone failed to provide a fully survivable response to the threat of increasingly accurate and numerous Soviet missiles and warheads. As he entered the Presidential election year, the combined efforts of his own administration, its critics in the Congress, and groups such as the Committee on the Present Danger had succeeded in firmly placing their concern about the threat of Soviet strategic superiority on the national agenda. Ironically, he would now find that same agenda being used against him, as Republican Presidential challenger Ronald Reagan launched an attack upon the Carter administration for having left open a strategic "window of vulnerability."

### Notes for Chapter 9

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  12. Brzezinski: p. 177. For a full account of the controversy over PRM-10, see Sanders: pp. 244-247.
  13. NYT; 8 July 1977: pp. 1,4.
  14. The Washington Post; 6 July 1977: p. 14.
  15. NYT; 8 July 1977, p. 1; and The Washington Post; 6

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19. Sanders; op. cit.: pp. 198-199; and Tyroler, op. cit.: pp. 5-9. For a full list of the new CPD's founding members, see Appendix V.

20. Kampelman, Max. (General Counsel to the CPD) "Introduction" to Tyroler: p. xv.

21. Ibid.: p. xvi.

22. Ibid.: p. xv; and Sanders, p. 68.

23. For a full list of those at the meeting, see Appendix IV.

24. Kampelman, in Tyroler: p. xvi. Emphasis added.

25. Ibid.: p. xv.

26. "Common Sense and the Common Danger," reprinted in Tyroler: p. 3-5.

27. Ibid.

28. Ibid.: p. 5.

29. Ibid.: p. 3.

30. Ibid.

31. Tyroler, Charles. "How the Committee on the Present Danger Will Operate;" 8 Sept. 1976. In Tyroler; op. cit.: p. 2.

32. Kampelman, op. cit.: p. xvii.

33. Ibid.; and Sanders: pp. 150-54; 183.

34. Sanders: p. 183.

35. Tyroler: p. xviii.

36. Vanderbilt Television News Index and Abstracts; January

1977.

37. Based on analysis of indices for the NYT, Washington Post, Time, Newsweek, USNWR, and Vanderbilt's Television News Archives for Nov 76-Apr 77; and further supported by a lack of references to the CPD in the Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature in the same period.
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39. Prados. op. cit.: p. 253.
40. Sanders: p. 180.
41. Quoted in ibid.: p. 191.
42. NYT; 23 Nov 1981: p. 20.
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## 10. Reagan and the Window of Vulnerability: Building and "Frittering Away" a Consensus on Defense

The leaders of the Republican Party resolved to make the Carter administration's defense policies a target for partisan political attack in the upcoming Presidential election as early as February 3, 1979. It was on that date, following an informal meeting in Easton, Maryland, that Senator Howard Baker (R-Tenn) led a group of 95 Republican officeholders, including 26 Senators, in announcing that "the Republican Party should abandon its 'traditional bipartisanship' in foreign policy," and launch an all-out attack "accusing the Carter administration of having let American military power decline and of having ignored 'Soviet aggressiveness.'<sup>1</sup> The following month, the Republican National Committee made the announcement a formal one, in what the New York Times described as "a sweeping attack...on the Carter administration's defense policies, saying that American military power was on the decline and that the United States was 'rapidly becoming number 2.'<sup>2</sup>

The language of the Republican National Committee's "attack," which was issued following a briefing to the

group by "several prominent conservative-minded defense specialists," including Paul Nitze, drew directly on the text of the Committee on the Present Danger's October 1978 study, "Is America Becoming Number 2?"<sup>3</sup> At the heart of the argument in both Committees' positions was concern over the "growing sophistication of the Soviet Union's missile arsenal," which would give the Russians the capability "of destroying almost all of the Air Force's 1,054 land-based rockets in the early 1980's."<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the solution urged by the Republicans, involving a "crash program" (which included the rapid deployment of the MX missile) to avoid a period of "vulnerability...of American missiles to a disarming first strike," could also have been taken directly from the Committee on the Present Danger's publication.<sup>5</sup> It was beginning to appear as if the Republicans were not the only ones who had decided to make national defense a partisan political issue.

By January 1980, news accounts of the Republican Presidential primary campaign reported that all of the major contenders were adopting the position that President Carter's defense programs were "inadequate."<sup>6</sup> Not surprisingly, when the party met for its Presidential nominating convention in July, this claim became a central plank in the Republican platform. Under headlines which observed "G.O.P. Plank: Arms Stressed," the New York Times

reported that the Republican foreign and defense policy platform contained "some of the most alarmist rhetoric used against the Soviet Union in a decade or more."<sup>7</sup> The platform itself proclaimed:

At the start of the 1980s, the United States faces the most serious challenge to its survival in the two centuries of its existence.... The premier challenge facing the United States, its allies, and the entire globe is to check the Soviet Union's global ambitions. This challenge must be met, for the present danger is greater than ever before....

Despite clear danger signals indicating that Soviet nuclear power would overtake that of the United States by the early 1980s, threatening the survival of the United States and making possible, for the first time in post-war history, political coercion and defeat, the [Carter] Administration reduced the size and capacity of our nuclear forces. As a result, a clear and present danger threatens...the Western world.

[S]ince 1977, the United States has moved from essential equivalence to inferiority in strategic nuclear forces.... As the disparity between American and Soviet strategic nuclear forces grows over the next three years, most U.S. land-based missiles, heavy bombers, and submarines in port will become vulnerable to a Soviet first strike. Such a situation invites diplomatic blackmail and coercion of the United States by the Soviet Union during the coming decade.

Republicans commit themselves to an immediate increase in defense spending to be applied judiciously to critically needed programs...[to include] the earliest possible deployment of the MX missile in a prudent survival configuration. We propose...a credible strategy which will deter a Soviet attack by the clear capability of our forces to survive and ultimately destroy Soviet military targets. We will build...to close the gap with the Soviets, and ultimately reach the position of military superiority that the

American people demand.<sup>8</sup>

The themes reflected in the Republican Party Platform already were embodied in the language which had been used by the party's nominee for President, Ronald Reagan, throughout the primary campaign. As early as January 1980, reporters covering the Reagan campaign could clearly discern that the former California Governor was seeking "to make military preparedness - or what he attacks as the lack of it by the United States - one of his central issues."<sup>9</sup> By the end of the month, he was reported to have "changed the basic speech that he delivers to most campaign audiences to one that rips repeatedly into Carter Administration foreign policy for 'bordering on appeasement' and insisting that the United States must initiate a significant buildup of its missiles and aircraft forces used to deliver nuclear weapons."<sup>10</sup> Moreover, as President Carter, in the aftermath of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the withdrawal of SALT II from Senate consideration, began to press for a 4.5% increase in defense spending himself, the Reagan campaign was perceived to respond by "moving even further to the right on military matters."<sup>11</sup>

As could be expected from the language of the Republican platform, following the July convention the Reagan campaign maintained its emphasis on defense and foreign policy

issues. By August, columnist Adam Clymer, writing for the New York Times, expressed his judgement that "not since the 'missile gap' of 1960 has defense policy been as much of an issue in a peacetime election as it is this year."<sup>12</sup> Judging by the amount of news coverage devoted to the issue, the nation's defense policies were an even bigger factor in the 1980 campaign than they had been in 1960. Time referred to the election campaign as "the great defense war."<sup>13</sup> Newsweek described it as "the battle of the button," in one of a series of articles focusing on the "National Security Debate in the Presidential Campaign."<sup>14</sup> All three major television network newscasts featured segments on the Soviet-American military balance almost weekly from July until the eve of the election.<sup>15</sup> Overall, there were nearly three times as many articles and news stories dealing with the issue of American strategic vulnerability between the Presidential nominating conventions and the election in 1980 as there were in 1960.<sup>16</sup>

One factor contributing to this difference between the coverage afforded the "missile gap" as an election issue and that given to the issue of "vulnerability" in 1980 would appear to be the degree to which the Carter administration itself contributed to the perception that a gap did exist between Soviet and American strategic

capabilities throughout 1980. While President Eisenhower never associated his administration with an endorsement of the "missile gap," the same clearly can not be said about President Carter. On January 27, the Carter administration released a CIA report which estimated that the Soviet Union outspent the United States by a factor of 50% in 1979.<sup>17</sup> By mid-May, unidentified "Carter administration aides" were quoting from a draft National Intelligence Estimate which they said indicated that "in the next few years the Soviet Union could achieve an edge over the United States in every major measure of strategic nuclear power."<sup>18</sup>

The crowning blow came on August 20, when Secretary of Defense Harold Brown, in a major address to the Naval War College in Rhode Island, told his audience that "the nation's force of land based missiles might now be vulnerable to attack from the Soviet Union, somewhat earlier than had been anticipated by the Pentagon." While he went on to point out that this did not mean that the other two legs of the "strategic triad," manned bombers and missile carrying submarines, were at risk, he qualified even this statement by observing that it was possible "that in the future, the country's entire nuclear arsenal would become vulnerable."<sup>19</sup> By that evening, the charge that there was an existing "window of vulnerability" had found a home in the campaign speeches of Ronald Reagan. As he told

the National Convention of the American Legion in Boston:

We must provide the defense spending and programs necessary to correct immediate and short-term vulnerabilities and deficiencies. Our nuclear deterrent forces must be made survivable as rapidly as possible to close the window of vulnerability before it opens any wider.<sup>20</sup>

As Ronald Reagan's language suggests, another factor keeping the "window of vulnerability" in the forefront of the 1980 Presidential election campaign was its constant reiteration by the Carter administration's Republican challengers. Here again, there is a significant difference between 1960 and 1980, for one of the striking features of the "missile gap" controversy was the inability of the Gaither Committee members to form an organization comparable to either the 1950 or the 1976 versions of the Committee on the Present Danger to help in taking their case to the public. Thus, at the time of the 1960 election, there was no single organized group whose efforts could be directed toward keeping the issue of the "gap" at the center of the campaign. In the 1980 election campaign, however, the existence of the Committee on the Present Danger appears to have had a marked impact on the campaign rhetoric of the Republican party, and especially its Presidential contender.

In January 1980, the Committee on the Present Danger published "an urgent program for the United States" in the

form of a document titled "The 1980 Crisis and What We Should Do About It."<sup>21</sup> The pamphlet was a response to the outcome of a meeting earlier that month, when several members of the Committee on the Present Danger's Executive Council had been invited to the White House to discuss their policy views with President Carter. According to accounts provided afterwards by Committee members who were present, the meeting proved less than satisfactory, and served to "throw cold water on whatever hopes [the Committee members] had that Iran and Afghanistan would have a broad effect on the President's foreign policy orientation."<sup>22</sup> "The 1980 Crisis..." reflected the Committee's frustration. "The Administration," it observed, "refuses to acknowledge that the United States has been becoming Number Two in military power." Comparing Carter's policies to efforts to appease Hitler prior to the outbreak of World War II, the Committee argued that:

The United States, particularly in the three years of the Carter Presidency, has, by words and acts of restraint, taken one unilateral step after another in the hope that the Soviet Union would accept such a policy of restraint for itself. The results of these efforts have been uniformly negative.... The events of 1979 and early 1980...make it clear that the Administration's policy is wrong;<sup>23</sup> it must be changed unequivocally and at once.

Having failed in its efforts to bring about that change from within the Carter administration, the Committee turned

its attentions toward replacing Carter with someone more sympathetic to its views. The fact that Ronald Reagan was already a member of the Committee made that task somewhat easier.<sup>24</sup> From January through the election in November, some 46 members of the Committee on the Present Danger served in various capacities as advisors to the Reagan campaign effort.<sup>25</sup> In early May, the Committee issued a study on "Countering the Soviet Threat" which was adopted almost in its entirety by the Republican platform committee.<sup>26</sup> Its call for the nation to "move decisively to restore its security and to stabilize the economy" became the twin pillars of the Reagan campaign. Although Reagan was unable to attend meetings of the Committee while he was on the campaign trail, he did receive regular briefings from members of the board, and on at least two occasions met with Committee director Charles Tyroler II and co-chairmen Paul Nitze and Eugene Rostow for sessions which lasted for five hours apiece.<sup>27</sup> Several of his speeches on SALT and the military balance were either drafted by members of the Committee, or drew extensively on already published Committee materials.<sup>28</sup> Although members of the Committee on the Present Danger had been unable to persuade President Carter to adopt their point of view in January, it was evident by mid-year that the defense and foreign policy agendas of the Committee and the Republican

Presidential campaign organization were virtually identical.

On November 7, 1980, just three days after the elections, President-elect Reagan acknowledged the debt he owed to the Committee on the Present Danger in a letter to the members of the Committee Board. "The work of the Committee on the present danger (sic) has certainly helped to shape the national debate," he observed. "The statements and studies of the Committee have had a wide national impact, and I benefited greatly from them."<sup>29</sup> One year later, the New York Times was to report on the sudden and "unexpected" rise to power of "a little known foreign policy group:" The Committee on the Present Danger, which, according to the Times' article had gone "from exile to influence" by placing one sixth of its total membership into positions within the Reagan administration.<sup>30</sup>

The combined efforts of this "little known foreign policy group" in shaping the national debate during the 1980 election, and the tacit acknowledgement by the Carter administration that the Soviet Union had made substantial strategic gains during his presidency, created a situation in which assertions that there was a "window of vulnerability" came to be treated as accepted fact during the course of the campaign. A series of seven articles on

"Defense: Is the U.S. Prepared?" which ran in the New York Times in September vividly illustrates this development. The series opened by noting that "a debate over the nation's military readiness, fueled by the Presidential campaign, has raised major questions about the ability of the armed forces to deter a nuclear or conventional challenge by the Soviet Union."<sup>31</sup> While taking into account the Carter administration's position that "American nuclear forces, as a whole, were still superior to the Soviet arsenal in terms of readiness and reliability," the series focused on arguments that "the United States military, long used to having a clear edge over the Soviet Union in nuclear might, is being forced to adjust to a new era in which the American strategic arsenal is becoming outdated and ever more vulnerable."<sup>32</sup> Despite the concurrent appearance of editorials decrying what one column called "the panicky atmosphere of America's new sense of vulnerability,"<sup>33</sup> it was front page headlines proclaiming "Nation's Military Anxiety Grows as Russians Gain" which caught the public's attention and led them to the conclusion that "most military experts, in and out of the Government, consider the impending vulnerability of the Air Force's Titan 2 and Minuteman missiles the most pressing nuclear problem confronting Washington."<sup>34</sup> By the end of September, a New York Times-CBS survey revealed that 63% of

those polled believed the United States had fallen behind the Soviet Union in strategic nuclear capabilities.<sup>35</sup>

While a consensus may have been emerging concerning the existence of a "window of vulnerability" during the election campaign, there was clearly not a corresponding level of agreement about how the "window" should be closed. While the Carter administration continued to support the deployment of the MX missile in multiple protective shelters (MX-MPS) which had been developed in conjunction with the SALT II limitations on strategic warheads, Ronald Reagan found himself in the position of calling for a more rapid deployment of the MX but opposing its planned basing mode.<sup>36</sup> Initially his opposition was tied to concern over the \$54 billion price tag which was associated with the MPS concept. As he explained in his televised debate with independent candidate John Anderson, "we need the missile...because we are so out of balance strategically that we lack a deterrent to a possible first assault, but I am not in favor of a plan that is so costly."<sup>37</sup> Subsequently, he added to his opposition the charge that without limits on the number of Soviet warheads, the system was not invulnerable to a first strike (an argument which emerged of necessity, given his stated aversion to the SALT II accords which were to have contained such limits).<sup>38</sup>

Yet at no point during the campaign did the Republican candidate propose an alternative method of basing the missile. As a result, Ronald Reagan came to the White House with no readily available option for deploying a missile which he had himself described as necessary to restore the strategic balance. This point did not go unnoticed by his critics. In October of 1981, Representative Melvin Price opened hearings on the President's "strategic modernization program," which was designed to close the "window of vulnerability," with the stark observation that "in recommending the elimination of the MPS basing mode the President has not provided an alternate system."<sup>39</sup> Thus, despite having just won an election which Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Policy (and former Committee on the Present Danger member) Richard Perle described as having provided "convincing evidence of a fundamental change in the attitude of the American people...[who now] demanded that the balance be restored," the Reagan administration discovered that it had no plan which would satisfy those demands to restore the balance in the critical area of modernizing the land-based ICBM force.<sup>40</sup>

This was not a problem which lent itself to rapid resolution. The issue of MX basing had been a subject of

intense political debate since 1974, and it remained a part of one throughout the early years of the Reagan administration.<sup>41</sup> As late as March 1982, the President's strategic modernization program was still being attacked on the grounds that while "most people agree on the threat from the Soviet buildup...the Administration has not yet...devised a strategy or specified the forces and weapons necessary to meet the threat."<sup>42</sup> The threat had been placed squarely on the national agenda for all to see. There was simply no equally visible response to that threat. It was a classic case of a failure to appreciate the warning which Edward Barrett had given thirty years earlier, as NSC-68 was about to be placed on the national agenda, when he advised that the administration "should have at least the broad proposals for action well in hand before the psychological 'scare campaign' begins."<sup>43</sup>

The result was a period of nearly three years during which the MX missile went through what one study has described as the "Reagan basing mode of the month club."<sup>44</sup> Initially, the administration sought to obtain Congressional approval for proceeding with the development and production of the MX in advance of a firm decision on how the missile would be based.<sup>45</sup> When the Congress placed MX funding on hold until the President submitted a basing plan, the administration proposed, in rapid succession,

plans for: interim basing of the MX in Titan ICBM silos until a final plan could be developed; interim basing in Minuteman silos; airborne basing in specially designed "big bird" launch aircraft; a proposal called "hydra" which involved underwater basing, either in unmanned canisters operated by remote control or in small submarines; and the "dense pack" closely spaced basing (CSB) mode, which called for placing all of the missiles together in one location under the assumption that incoming Soviet warheads would destroy each other and thus the retaliatory strike force would be protected.<sup>46</sup> At one point the administration was even seriously considering a modification of the Carter administration's first proposal, a possible trade in which the United States would cancel the MX in return for the Soviet Union dismantling its already deployed SS-18 ICBMs.<sup>47</sup> By June 1982, even the Committee on the Present Danger was concerned over the apparent inability of the administration to decide what it wanted to do with the MX. Quoting the President's own call "to close the window of vulnerability before it opens any wider," the Committee issued a statement which observed that "failure to do this, particularly for the ICBM force, is the most disturbing aspect of the Administration's strategic program.... It has...not decided on an alternate basing mode. The entire MX program is now unclear."<sup>48</sup>

While the Reagan administration may have been unclear about its plans for the MX, there was no lack of clarity concerning its continued belief that the window of vulnerability still remained to be closed. To the contrary, the rhetoric associated with the idea of Soviet strategic superiority appeared to increase in the aftermath of the Reagan election, as the President attempted to maintain public and Congressional support for his proposals to increase defense spending while at the same time cutting funds from virtually all other programs. The tone for this effort, which grew out of Reagan's campaign pledges to close the window of vulnerability while simultaneously cutting taxes and balancing the federal budget, was set in the President's call for a 20% increase in military outlays over the next two years in his first State of the Union Address.<sup>49</sup>

Within two weeks, Secretary of Defense Casper Weinberger, stating that "it is important that the American people realize the importance of rearming America," began a massive campaign to sell the public and the Congress on an increase of \$7.2 billion over the Carter administration's proposed \$181.5 billion defense budget for 1981.<sup>50</sup> "It would be dangerously naive," the Secretary of Defense maintained, "to expect the Soviet Union, if it once achieves clear military superiority, not to try to exploit

their military capability even more fully than they are doing now."<sup>51</sup> President Reagan carried the charge further, stating that as a result of their "massive military buildup," the Soviet Union had already created an "imbalance of forces in critical defense areas," which made "substantial increases" in military spending necessary.<sup>52</sup> Media analyses of the President's program, while sometimes questioning the size of the military buildup being proposed, tended to accept the need for "turning a tougher face toward Russia," as an article in U.S. News and World Report put it.<sup>53</sup>

By mid-May, the administration's campaign appeared to be paying dividends, as both the House and the Senate endorsed the President's call for increases in military spending.<sup>54</sup> The House actually approved military outlays of nearly \$1 billion more than the President had requested for 1982, and the Senate, after a debate in which, according to the New York Times, "few questions were raised about the size of the military budget," voted in favor of the increase by a margin of 92-1.<sup>55</sup> These actions, the Times continued, "appeared only to underscore the widespread support in Congress for increased military spending."<sup>56</sup>

The President responded by proclaiming that the country's "era of self-doubt is over." In a graduation address to

the Cadets at West Point, President Reagan asserted that "the public's spiritual revival and a bipartisan, patriotic mood in Congress, [have] swept away 'the Vietnam syndrome,'" which he blamed for having delayed American rearmament. "Let friend and foe alike," he concluded, "be made aware of the spirit that is sweeping across our land, because it means we will meet our responsibility to the free world."<sup>57</sup> Defense Secretary Weinberger, however, was somewhat more cautious. In an address that same day to the graduating Cadets at the Air Force Academy, he warned that what he saw as "a fragile national consensus" for more military strength could well be lost if the administration did anything "to lose the peoples' confidence."<sup>58</sup>

Weinberger's concern was well founded, for the administration's victory in the Congress had not been total. Included in the Senate's action was a provision which froze all production funds for the MX until the President submitted a final basing plan to the Congress.<sup>59</sup> Moreover, as the House and Senate moved to debate the administration's budget appropriations proposals for fiscal year 1982, there were growing signs of resistance to the President's plans for increasing military spending at the expense of funding for domestic programs. Little over one week after Reagan's optimistic speech to the graduating class at West Point, front page headlines in the New York

Times announced that "Skepticism Rises on Plans to Raise Budget For Arms."<sup>60</sup> In the accompanying article, Senator John Stennis (D-Miss), a proponent of increased military spending, was quoted as having observed that "there are serious warning flags being raised...that there will be great pressure to restrain the defense budget" unless the federal deficit could be drastically reduced. According to Stennis, "the public support for the military and the military budget will evaporate quickly if our military forces do not show real improvement without damaging the health of our economy."<sup>61</sup>

As had proven to be the case for the Truman administration during the period of NSC-68, and the Eisenhower administration during the missile gap, efforts to respond to concerns about the Soviet threat which had become part of the national agenda were coming into conflict with the President's own stated fiscal policies. In 1981, the President initially appeared to be prepared to follow in Eisenhower's footsteps and stress the theme of fiscal responsibility. On 13 September, the New York Times reported that Reagan had announced that he would trim his requests for military spending by over \$20 billion for the next three years "to help meet his goal of balancing the federal budget by 1984."<sup>62</sup> There was, however, one key difference between Reagan's commitment to a balanced budget

and that of Eisenhower. Eisenhower had never been convinced that the nation was seriously threatened by the existence of a missile gap, and thus never saw his fiscal policies as imperiling national survival. Reagan and his closest advisors, on the other hand, believed firmly that the country would be unable to protect its national interests if the threat represented by the window of vulnerability was allowed to go unchecked. As a result, by the first week in November the President had reversed his earlier stress on economic priorities, and announced that he could no longer seek to balance the budget by 1984.<sup>63</sup>

Moreover, as budgetary priorities began to openly conflict with the administration's defense priorities, the President's decision to stress the issue of national security led to an increase in the rhetoric associated with the window of vulnerability. As pressure to hold down defense spending grew, the administration responded by stepping up its efforts to portray the immediacy of the Soviet threat. These efforts were underway even as the President was indicating that he might have to hold down military spending. On 27 September 1981, the Pentagon announced that it would publish a 99 page handbook called "The Soviet Threat," drawing on "sanitized" intelligence data in what was described as "an acknowledged public relations campaign...to dispel doubts, particularly in the

United States and Western Europe, about the Administration's contention that the Soviet Union is embarked on a major spending campaign to gain military superiority over the West.<sup>64</sup> From October 1981 through March 1982, a steady stream of administration witnesses repeatedly told the Congress that, as Defense Secretary Weinberger put it, the Soviet buildup and "lack of consensus" as to how to respond during the Carter years "has put us in a vulnerable and dangerous position and we have to recover from it immediately."<sup>65</sup> By April 1982, the administration was claiming in both public statements and Congressional testimony that the Soviet Union already enjoyed "a definite margin of superiority" over the United States in strategic military capabilities.<sup>66</sup>

Such charges served to generate both public and Congressional alarm. After hearing Undersecretary of Defense for Research and Engineering Richard D. Delauer testify that the administration was currently striving "to reduce the U.S. margin of inferiority," Representative Dan Daniel (D-Va.) described the mood of his committee as "infuriated" and "frightened" by the official use of the word "inferiority" to describe the U.S. position.<sup>67</sup> Representative James Nelligan expressed a similar reaction following testimony that "Soviet military superiority is now well established and will prevail into the 1990s," and

asked for the administration's suggestions "as to...what we can do to better get the American people to accept the premise that we are inferior to the Soviet Union?"<sup>68</sup> In the New York Times, an editorial column on 11 April 1982 expressed the belief that the administration had already done an excellent job of generating such acceptance, stating that the concept of American strategic vulnerability had "become a psychological fact."<sup>69</sup>

Nevertheless, this "psychological fact" did not readily translate into public willingness to support the increases in defense spending which the Reagan administration sought. By early fall 1982, legislators returning to Washington after their summer recess were reporting that they had found their constituents "resistant to sharp rises in defense spending."<sup>70</sup> Public opinion polls described the "mood of the American public" as "volatile" and "unstable." Their surveys reflected seemingly contradictory results, such as one New York Times-CBS poll which found 40% of those who said they supported the growing "nuclear freeze movement" also indicating that they opposed any cuts in military spending below the levels proposed by the President.<sup>71</sup>

One reason for the apparent confusion in public opinion was the fact that the administration still had not been

able to define a specific program which would close the window of vulnerability; a fact highlighted by the continuing inability to find a basing mode for the MX missile. In response to charges by Representative Les Aspin (D-Wis) that "This Administration came into office objecting to SALT II...and criticizing the Carter plan for mobile basing of the MX missile.... Now here we are 15 months later and the Administration has no clear idea about how it will replace either," a Defense Department spokesman (who for obvious reasons chose to remain anonymous) was forced to acknowledge that "We have not been very smart about the MX."<sup>72</sup> As a result, the administration conceded, "support for the arms buildup is beginning to go at the edges." Representative Aspin was somewhat more blunt. "The defense consensus of last year," he contended, "has been frittered away."<sup>73</sup>

Notes for Chapter 10

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1. "GOP Leaders Support Dissent In Foreign Policy," NYT; 4 February 1979: p. 1.
  2. "U.S. Military Strength Declining, Republicans Say," NYT; 2 March 1979: p. 11.
  3. Committee on the Present Danger. "Is America Becoming Number 2?" 5 October 1978; in Tyroler; op. cit.: pp. 39-93; and NYT 2 March 1979: p. 11.
  4. Tyroler: p. 59, and NYT; 2 March 1979: p. 11.
  5. NYT; 2 March 1979: p. 11.
  6. NYT; 7 January 1980: p. 1; and 16 January 1980: p. 18.
  7. NYT; 12 July 1980: p. 1.
  8. Republican Party Platform, 1980. In Congressional Quarterly, Historic Documents of 1980; CQ Press, Washington D.C.; 1981: pp. 622-636, emphasis added.
  9. NYT; 30 January 1980: p. 18
  10. Ibid.
  11. NYT; 30 Jan. 1980, p. 18; 18 March 1980, p. B-8; and 22 March 1980, p. 8.
  12. Clymer, Adam. "Behind Every Defense Policy There Lurks a Political Idea," NYT; 24 August 1980: Section IV, p. 4.
  13. "The Great Defense War," Time; 27 October 1980: pp. 29-30.
  14. "Battle of the Button," Newsweek; 1 September 1980: PP. 18-19.
  15. From analysis of the Vanderbilt Television News Index

and Abstracts; op. cit.; 1980.

16. The figure is approximate, since the TV data is not available for 1960. However, for the NYT alone, there were 106 items on strategic defense (18 on p. 1) from July through election day 1980, but only 37 (1 on p. 1) for 1960.

17. NYT; 27 January 1980: p. 3.

18. Burt, Richard. "Soviet Nuclear Edge in Mid-80's Is Envisioned by U.S. Intelligence," NYT; 13 May 1980: p. 12.

19. "Brown Says ICBM's May Be Vulnerable to Russians Now," NYT; 21 August 1980: p. 1.

20. Reagan, Ronald. "Speech to the American Legion National Convention, Boston, Massachusetts," 20 August 1980; in Tyroler, op. cit.: p. 202.

21. The Committee on the Present Danger. "The 1980 Crisis and What We Should Do About It," 22 January 1980; in Tyroler; op. cit.: pp. 170-177.

22. Jeanne Kirkpatrick, quoted in Sanders; op. cit.: p. 282.

23. "The 1980 Crisis...", in Tyroler; op. cit.: pp. 171-172.

24. Reagan had joined in January 1979. See Sanders, op. cit.: p. 282

25. Sanders: p. 282.

26. Committee on the Present Danger. "Countering the Soviet Threat," 9 May 1980; in Tyroler: pp. 178-183. See also NYT; 11 May 1980: p. 12.

27. Scheer, Robert. With Enough Shovels; op. cit.: pp. 40-41.

28. Ibid.: p. 40.

29. Reagan, Ronald. Letter to "My Fellow Board Members and Friends of the Committee on the Present Danger," November 7, 1980; reproduced in Tyroler: p. 329.

30. "Group Goes From Exile to Influence," NYT; 23 November 1981: p. 22. For a list of the 32 Committee members (out of 182 total) in the administration at that time, see

## Appendix VI.

31. NYT; 21 September 1980: p. 1.
32. NYT; 22 September 1980: pp. 1, 22.
33. "Defense Nerves Are Showing," NYT 16 September 1980: p. 27
34. NYT; 21 September 1980: p. 1; 22 September 1980: p. 22.
35. NYT; 22 September 1980: p. 58.
36. NYT; 22 September 1980: p. B-6.
37. Ibid.
38. From testimony of Richard Perle to the House Committee on Armed Services, in U.S. House of Representatives, Strategic Programs; op. cit.: p. 68.
39. U.S. House of Representatives. Strategic Programs; op. cit.: p. 2.
40. Ibid.: p. 61.
41. Holland and Hoover; op. cit.: pp. 129-131.
42. "Criticism Rises on Reagan's Plan For 5-Year Growth of Military," NYT; 22 March 1982: p. 1.
43. See Chapter 3. FRUS; 1950: Vol. I, p. 226.
44. Holland and Hoover: p. 172.
45. NYT; 15 May 1981: p. 15.
46. See the NYT accounts of 3 October 1981, p. 1; 5 February 1982, p. 18; 6 January 1983, p. 26; 28 February 1983, p. 1. Details of these plans may be found in Holland and Hoover: pp. 170-172, 215-228.
47. The proposal was made in March 1982 by Richard Burt of the State Department, and successfully opposed by Richard Perle. See Talbott; op. cit.: pp. 243-245.
48. Committee on the Present Danger. "Has America Become Number 2?" 29 June 1982. In Tyroler: pp. 214, 237.
49. [NYT]; 19 February 1981: p. 1.

50. NYT; 5 March 1981: p. 1.
51. Ibid.: p. B-10.
52. NYT; 31 March 1981: p. 6.
53. "Turning a Tougher Face Toward Russia," USNWR; 16 February 1981: pp. 31-38.
54. "Democrats in House Add More Military Funds to Proposed Budget," NYT; 30 April 1981: p. 1; and "Senate Votes Military Funds in Victory for Reagan," NYT; 15 May 1981: p. 15.
55. Ibid.
56. NYT; 15 May 1981: p. 15.
57. Reagan, Ronald. "Graduation Address to Cadets of the United States Military Academy," 27 May 1981; text in NYT; 28 May 1981: p. 1, 20.
58. NYT; 28 May 1981: p. D-20.
59. NYT; 15 May 1981: p. 1.
60. NYT; 7 June 1981: p. 1.
61. Ibid.: pp. 1, 26.
62. NYT; 13 September 1981: p. 1.
63. NYT; 7 November 1981: p. 1.
64. NYT; 27 September 1981: p. 1.
65. U.S. House of Representatives; Strategic Programs; op. cit.: p. 18.
66. NYT; 1 April 1982: p. 1; and U.S. House, Strategic Programs: pp. 212, 228-229, 230, 324, 325.
67. Ibid.: pp. 207-235.
68. Ibid.: pp. 324, 336.
69. NYT; 11 April 1982: Section IV, p. 16.
70. "Legislators Say Public Is Resistant to Sharp Rise in Military Spending," NYT; 8 September 1982: p. 1.

71. NYT; 15 August 1982: Section IV, p. 4.
72. NYT; 1 April 1982: p. 23.
73. Ibid.

## 11. Shutting the Window of Vulnerability Or Merely Pulling Down the Shade?

The inability of the Reagan administration to find a suitable basing mode for the MX missile was not the result of lack of effort. The process of "frittering away" the election year defense consensus can be tied more appropriately to a failure on the part of the first Presidential commission charged with finding a home for the MX to fully appreciate the political nature of the decision it had been called upon to make. In April 1981, following the original Congressional decision to freeze funding for the project, the President commissioned a panel of technical experts under the chairmanship of Dr. Charles Townes, Professor of Physics at the University of California at Berkeley, to find a feasible means of deploying the new ICBM.<sup>1</sup> After seven months of study, the Townes Commission concluded that "there exists no single answer to the ICBM vulnerability problem."<sup>2</sup>

Its recommendations proposed interim basing of the MX in existing silos while study continued on several other options, including airborne basing, use of an anti-ballistic missile system, and the use of terrain

features to "hide" the silos from incoming warheads.<sup>3</sup> This proposal was unacceptable to both the administration, which sent the Commission back to restudy the problem with an emphasis on the idea of closely spaced basing, and to the Congress, which had already rejected both the concept of interim silo basing and airborne basing. The general reaction of both the legislative and executive branches to the Townes Commission's initial report was perhaps best expressed by Representative Samuel Stratton (D-NY), who exclaimed "Now, if I understand you correctly, the unanimous recommendation of the commission, which I take that you regard as the ultimate, final result of this report, is for somebody not designated by you to take another look at MX... That essentially is all you have done, isn't it?"<sup>4</sup>

When the Commission returned with its second report, providing the analysis of the "dense pack" (or closely spaced basing) mode which the administration had requested, it met with only slightly more success than its first effort. The President, having been given a deadline of 1 December 1982 by the Congress to propose a permanent deployment mode for the MX or see the missile cancelled, adopted the "dense pack" concept on November 22.<sup>5</sup> In the course of the ensuing Congressional testimony, however, it became evident that the Townes Commission had not been

unanimous in its recommendation of the "dense pack" proposal, and that Professor Townes himself had reservations about whether the system could be made to work.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, in the short time between endorsing the report and submitting it to the Congress, the administration had failed to marshall the full support of the Joint Chiefs of Staff behind the proposal, with the result that they were unable to defend it, and in some cases unable even to adequately explain it, to Congress.<sup>7</sup> The House defeated the proposal by a vote of 245-176 on December 7, 1982. The Senate never even brought the proposal to a vote.<sup>8</sup>

As 1982 drew to a close, the Congress, by its own count, had considered 34 separate proposals for basing the MX missile.<sup>9</sup> None of them had provided a home for the new ICBM, which was being described in the New York Times as the strategic "Flying Dutchman of our time."<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, the concept that there was indeed a "window of vulnerability" which demanded to be closed proved to be too strong for the Congress to kill the MX program, given the absence of any other viable means of modernizing the land-based leg of the strategic triad.<sup>11</sup> As a result, Congress once again placed the production funds for the MX on "hold," but approved continued research and development and, at the same time, instructed the President to continue

to search for "a credible way to base the system and protect it from potential attack."<sup>12</sup>

The Reagan administration reacted angrily to the Congressional decision to withhold the MX production funds. The President called the vote a "grave mistake," and observed that he "had hoped that most of the members of the House had awakened to the threat facing the United States. That hope was apparently unfounded. A majority chose to go sleepwalking into the future."<sup>13</sup> He also announced his intention "to do everything I can to take this case to the American people."<sup>14</sup> In this, he was in effect responding to appeals from members of Congress who had expressed "the need for this administration to creatively present this program in such a manner that defers to the intelligence of the American people" in order to remove the "great skepticism" about the MX which was reported among their constituents.<sup>15</sup> As Senator Roger W. Jepsen (R-Iowa) explained his position to Secretary of Defense Weinberger:

As an elected official I do have a responsibility to clarify issues for my constituents as well as represent them in the Senate. I have tried to defend the President on this issue, but Mr. Secretary, unless the President and the Department of Defense embark on a sustained educating and selling campaign around the country, I fear this proposal [to fund the MX] is in serious trouble.<sup>16</sup>

Similar sentiments were expressed by Senator Henry Jackson (D-Wash), who was specifically concerned about the inability of the administration to develop a "credible response...to the growing asymmetries between U.S. and Soviet nuclear capabilities."<sup>17</sup> As Senator Jackson saw it, "the problem that we have here, and I speak as a politician..., is that the MX has suffered a serious debasement by reason of a whole series of proposed basing modes.... The public has the idea that it is a boondoggle, a Rube Goldberg. You cannot explain it." What was needed, he explained, was some means "to try to find a political solution to this problem."<sup>18</sup>

The first step in selling the MX to the public was obviously going to have to be finding such a "political solution" to the basing mode problem which would then allow the administration to explain it. The Townes Commission, however, had specifically avoided considerations of this "political" issue in its efforts to find a home for the MX. According to Charles Townes, the Commission "generally stuck to the technical and military arguments, and tried to downplay the...political considerations because our committee were not necessarily experts in that area."<sup>19</sup> To rectify this situation, the President appointed yet another panel to study the problems associated with MX basing. Unlike the Townes Commission, which had been limited in its

charter to examination of the technical feasibility of specific basing modes, the new Commission was given a broad charter to "review the purpose, character, size, and composition of the strategic forces of the United States."<sup>20</sup> Included in this charter were specific instructions to consult with the Congress and the military in an effort to build political support for the Commission's recommendations prior to completing their report.<sup>21</sup>

The new panel, which was officially titled "The President's Commission on Strategic Forces," was headed by retired Air Force General Brent Scowcroft, who had served as National Security Advisor to President Ford and had been a member of the earlier Townes Commission.<sup>22</sup> Overall, however, the Scowcroft Commission (as it came to be called) and the Townes Commission were quite dissimilar in their makeup. As the New York Times account of the Scowcroft Commission's appointment observed, "in contrast to some earlier MX study panels that included a heavy representation of technical experts, the commission appointed today appears to put emphasis on former military policy specialists, including some prominent past advocates of the MX missile."<sup>23</sup> The panel, which was almost invariably described as "bipartisan," included former Deputy Secretary of Defense William Clements, former

Secretary of State Alexander Haig, former CIA Director Richard Helms, former Under Secretary of Defense William J. Perry, and former Under Secretary of the Navy R. James Woolsey. Former Secretary of Defense Harold Brown was originally on the Commission, but subsequently stepped down and served instead in an advisory capacity, along with fellow former Secretaries of Defense James Schlesinger, Melvin Laird, and Donald Rumsfeld. Henry Kissinger was also included as an advisor, as were President Carter's former counselor, Lloyd Cutler, and former CIA Director John McCone.<sup>24</sup> All together, it was a group with impressive credentials for the task of addressing the "political" issues associated with MX basing.

That this was indeed the focus of the Scowcroft Commission's efforts is evident from the manner in which they approached their task and their subsequent testimony to the Congress. As General Scowcroft explained when he introduced the Commission's report to the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, "the first point [which had to be dealt with] was the political point, in the sense that every proposal for arms control and modernization of our strategic forces over about the past decade has become embroiled in increasingly partisan...divisive debate."<sup>25</sup> In sharp contrast to the Townes Commission, which operated in virtual secrecy, the Scowcroft Commission included both a

Congressional liaison officer and a public relations consultant on its staff to assist in dealing with this "political point."<sup>26</sup>

The Commission met for the first time on January 7, 1983, with all of its members reported to be "keenly aware that another failure to find a land-based intercontinental missile option acceptable to Congress will jeopardize deployment of any new missile in the coming years."<sup>27</sup> The Commission members were also aware that their recommendations would have to secure the support of the President and the Joint Chiefs of Staff if they were to avoid a repeat of the problems encountered by the Townes Commission. At the end of the Commission's first month, Scowcroft and most of the other members met with the President for two hours and fifteen minutes to discuss their findings and request an extension of their original deadline of 18 February to allow them to pursue further consultations with Congress.<sup>28</sup> Eventually, the Commission's charter was extended through the end of March. By the time they finished their report, they had met among themselves 28 times, and consulted with over 200 members of Congress and technical experts.<sup>29</sup> They had also met twice with the Joint Chiefs, and once more with the President, as they attempted to hammer out a proposal which would satisfy all of groups necessary to ensure the adoption of their

recommendations.<sup>30</sup> As Herbert Hetu, the commission's public relations consultant, described the process, "the President's instructions were to consult with Congress, and that is what we have been doing.... What's building here is a consensus."<sup>31</sup>

The success of the Scowcroft Commission in generating such a consensus within the government was evident almost immediately upon the submission of its report. The President, in his public acceptance of the Commission Report on April 20, announced that their findings already had been unanimously endorsed by the National Security Council and the Joint Chiefs of Staff.<sup>32</sup> The Commission members were owed a "national debt of gratitude," the President proclaimed, for having successfully sought "a common objective: to achieve a greater degree of national consensus concerning our approach to strategic force modernization and arms control."<sup>33</sup>

Congressional reaction to the report echoed a similar refrain. Senate Foreign Relations Committee chairman Charles Percy (R-Ill), expressing his appreciation for "the manner in which the Commission reached out to members of Congress to solicit their views," proclaimed that the report "deserves strong bipartisan support from Congress and the American people."<sup>34</sup> Democratic Senator Henry

Jackson lent a bipartisan air to the tributes directed toward the Commission, expressing his belief that the Commission's effort in "reaching out across party lines and into the Congressional system was a wise and very welcome development."<sup>35</sup> By May 26, the press was reporting "a sharp turnaround" by the Congress, which reversed its December 1982 votes to freeze MX funds by a 239-186 margin in the House and by 59-39 in the Senate.<sup>36</sup> "The critical factor in this changed attitude," according to the New York Times, "was the report by the Presidential Commission last month that packaged the MX plan."<sup>37</sup>

The "package" which the Scowcroft Commission supplied for the MX went well beyond considerations of mere basing modes. As stated in their report, the Commission "concluded that the preferred approach for modernizing our ICBM force seems to have three components: initiating engineering design of a single-warhead small ICBM, to reduce target value and permit flexibility in basing for better long-term survivability; seeking arms control agreements designed to enhance stability [by limiting the total number of warheads permitted to each side]; and deploying MX missiles in existing silos now to satisfy the immediate needs of our ICBM force."<sup>38</sup>

Politically, what the Scowcroft Commission had done was

to barter Administration concessions on arms control for Congressional concessions in agreeing to allow the production of the MX. Ironically, the "Midgetman" single warhead missile endorsed by the Commission was linked to the successful conclusion of an arms control agreement with the Soviet Union as tightly as the MX MPS basing mode had been linked to SALT II, since it made little sense for the United States to move away from the use of "MIRVs" if the Soviet Union could not be persuaded to do likewise.<sup>39</sup> The administration was willing to accept this linkage, however, because it appeared to be the only means through which the votes could be won in Congress to allow production to proceed on the MX.

The Commission's argument in favor of proceeding with the production of the MX, which would have precisely the sort of 10 warhead MIRV capability the Midgetman was supposed to be moving away from, derived from the fact that the USSR had already deployed an ICBM (the SS-18) with capabilities similar to those which would be provided by the MX.<sup>40</sup> It had been the deployment of the SS-18, with its highly accurate multiple warheads, which had prompted Team B's concern over the vulnerability of American ICBMs in the first place. The Scowcroft Commission accepted what was, in essence, the Team B intelligence assessment, acknowledging that as a result of Soviet SS-18 deployments,

and the failure of the United States to deploy the MX:

The Soviets...now probably possess the necessary combination of ICBM numbers, reliability, accuracy, and warhead yield to destroy almost all of the 1047 U.S. ICBM silos, using only a portion of their own ICBM force. The U.S. ICBM force now deployed cannot inflict similar damage, even using the entire force.<sup>41</sup>

The U.S. deployment of 100 MX missiles would redress this "strategic imbalance," according to the Commission, by giving the United States the capability to threaten the Soviet missiles in their silos as well. Faced with such a threat, it was hoped that the Soviet Union could be persuaded to agree to arms limitations which would restore the survivability of both sides' land-based deterrent forces.<sup>42</sup> Thus the MX, Midgetman, and arms control features of the Scowcroft report were presented to both the administration and the Congress as a single package.<sup>43</sup>

The most controversial element of this package, it soon developed, was the decision of the Commission to recommend basing those 100 MX missiles in the same silos it acknowledged were already vulnerable to a Soviet strike. Senator James Exon (D-Neb) expressed the sense of many of his Congressional colleagues when he described the Commission's basing mode recommendation as "astonishing...in view of the overwhelming evidence previously before us that the MX should not be deployed

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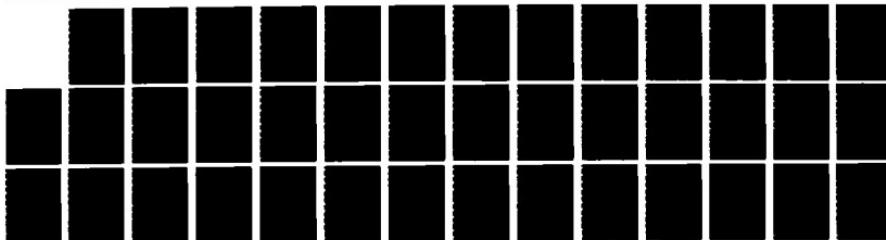
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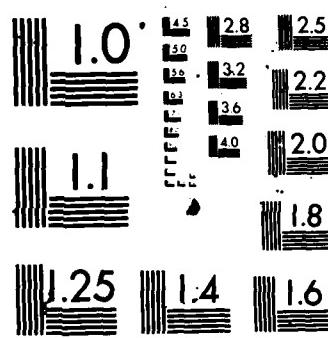
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without some chance of survivability." The Nebraska Senator went on to observe that the decision "might satisfy the supposedly wonderful bipartisan consensus, but that does not necessarily guarantee that such a course of action will really enhance the national security interests of the United States."<sup>44</sup> The crucial problem, as expressed by Senator Carl Levin (D-Mich), was that while "MX has been sold to the American public by this administration and the last administration to close a window of vulnerability.... What it now comes down to is this: This proposal does not close that window of vulnerability."<sup>45</sup> The same sentiment had been expressed earlier in the House, when Representative William A. Dickinson (R-Ala), the ranking Republican on the Committee on Armed Services, criticized the plan to base the MX in existing ICBM silos by complaining that:

Your proposed basing mode...does not directly address the growing threat to our prompt counterforce capability. From my understanding of the physics of the problem, it is almost impossible to guarantee a respectable level of survivability with missiles encased in silos...given the accuracy and megatonage of Soviet ICBM's.... We are trying to address our so-called window of vulnerability, and I am concerned that we are not closing that window of vulnerability, but simply pulling down the shade.<sup>46</sup>

In fact, the Scowcroft Commission did not take great exception to this interpretation. As Commission member

James Schlesinger stated in response to the charges made by Senator Levin, "I endorse the view that...the new missile, by itself, does nothing to close the window of vulnerability."<sup>47</sup> The former Secretary of Defense went on to deliver a critique of the Reagan administration's previous handling of the issue, charging that "the Administration's present and prospective MX difficulties are to a considerable extent its own creation. From the first it has inordinately tied the case for the MX to a survivable basing mode.... Much of the rhetoric about 'closing the window of vulnerability' presupposed some easy U.S. solution to ICBM vulnerability." And this, according to Schlesinger, "was hot air." As a result, he contended, "the administration has now become entangled in its own rhetoric."<sup>48</sup>

In an effort to disentangle the administration from its rhetoric, the Scowcroft Commission Report moved to define away the window of vulnerability which had been predicted for the 1980s. While acknowledging the Soviet capability to destroy American ICBMs in their silos, the Report concluded that "in the judgement of the Commission, the vulnerability of such silos in the near term, viewed in isolation, is not a sufficiently dominant part of the overall problem of ICBM modernization to warrant other immediate steps being taken."<sup>49</sup> This judgement was based on the "mutual

survivability" of the American strategic deterrent forces inherent in the "Triad" concept of spreading our retaliatory capabilities among ICBMs, bombers, and submarine launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs). It was impossible, according to virtually all strategic studies, for the Soviet Union to launch an attack which would wipe out any one leg of the Triad without giving the other two groups of forces adequate warning time in which to retaliate.<sup>50</sup> Taken in isolation, our land-based ICBM forces were acknowledged to be vulnerable, but when seen as part of the overall structure of American forces, the Commission members expressed the conviction that there would be no real "window of vulnerability" to a Soviet first strike until the end of the century.<sup>51</sup>

Although Administration critics such as McGeorge Bundy seized upon the report as "convincing evidence" that "the window of vulnerability is slammed shut on the fearful fingers of the Committee on the Present Danger," General Scowcroft was adamant that this was not the case.<sup>52</sup> In testimony before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, the Commission's chairman explained that:

We have not, as many have suggested, reversed or closed the window of vulnerability. Whatever one thinks about the vulnerability of those silos, they are likely to become more vulnerable in the future. But...we feel that for now, and perhaps for a decade in the future, we have what I would call a synergistic survivability [among

the legs of the Triad]. We have not stepped back from the survivability problem. What we have said is that we think that there is a greater period of time to solve it.<sup>53</sup>

Whether the window of vulnerability was "slammed shut," or simply, as Harold Brown testified, "never opened as wide as was suggested," the impact of the Scowcroft Commission Report on the rhetoric of the window was the same as Secretary of Defense McNamara's study of Soviet ICBM strength had been on the missile gap. The term "window of vulnerability" dropped from usage in Reagan administration statements following the debate over the Scowcroft Report in Congress during the summer of 1983, and it has not reappeared.<sup>54</sup> It is not surprising that this should be the case, since for the administration to have continued to proclaim the existence of the window would have only served to undermine the case being made by the Commission members for the deployment of the MX.

The MX basing proposals of the Scowcroft Commission, however, did not enjoy the same immediate degree of success as had the Commission's efforts to untangle the administration from the rhetoric of the window of vulnerability. It was not until December 1985 that Congress finally approved the funds necessary to deploy MX missiles in Minuteman silos, and then only for 50 missiles, as opposed to the 100 proposed by the Commission.<sup>55</sup> In the

course of the debate leading up to this decision, the House at one point actually voted 214-210 to kill the entire MX program, and extensive personal lobbying by the President was necessary to win a 211-208 reversal of that vote.<sup>56</sup>

Tied to this reluctance on the part of the Congress to provide a solid margin of support for the strategic programs called for in Scowcroft Commission Report has been a sharp decline in the perception of public support for defense spending over the last several years of the Reagan administration. Since the Reagan administration came to office riding on its campaign charges of an imminent window of vulnerability, there has been a complete reversal in the findings of public opinion polls on this issue. In 1980, those favoring an increase in defense spending outnumbered those favoring a decrease by 35%. By 1985, the Gallup Poll was reporting that by the same margin of 35%, those favoring a decrease in defense spending outnumbered those favoring an increase.<sup>57</sup>

By February 26, 1986, pressures for further cuts in the administration's defense spending package had grown to the point that the President felt compelled to go on national television to warn the American people that "the security program that you and I launched to restore America's strength is in jeopardy, threatened by those who would quit

before the job is done."<sup>58</sup> While Ronald Reagan did not go so far as to resurrect the charge that the United States faced a "window of vulnerability," he did describe the growing perception that America was now militarily superior to the Soviet Union as "reckless, dangerous, and wrong." Moreover, in language strikingly similar to that which set the stage for Team B nearly ten years earlier, the President reminded the country that:

Between 1970 and 1985 alone, the Soviets invested \$500 billion more than the United States in defense, and built nearly three times as many strategic missiles. As a consequence of their enormous weapons investment, major military imbalances still exist between our two countries.... We have begun to close some of those gaps, but if we are to retain our margins of safety, more must be done.<sup>59</sup>

Given the tone of the President's language, it is at least possible that McGeorge Bundy was somewhat premature in announcing that the window of vulnerability had been "given a fitting burial" by the findings of the Scowcroft Commission.<sup>60</sup> Given the fact that the President felt compelled to use that language, it is virtually certain that the administration no longer believes that the Commission's call for "achieving a greater degree of national consensus with respect to our strategic deployments and arms control" has been attained.<sup>61</sup> Indeed, despite the assertion by Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman John Tower that "the Scowcroft Commission's

recommended MX program can become the cornerstone of a new national consensus on defense issues, a consensus whose emergence is indispensable both to our ability to deter aggression and to realize stabilizing arms control agreements,<sup>62</sup> there is little evidence to suggest that such a consensus has actually been erected on that cornerstone. To the contrary, it would appear that in disposing of the rhetoric of the "window of vulnerability," the Scowcroft Commission also contributed to undermining the public perception of a Soviet threat immediate enough to help forge the consensus the Commission sought to construct.

Notes for Chapter 11

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1. U.S. House of Representatives. Strategic Programs: p. 175-176. For a full list of the Townes Commission members, see Appendix VII.
  2. Ibid.: p. 177.
  3. "Report of the Committee on MX Basing, Executive Summary," in ibid.: p. 181-183.
  4. Ibid.: pp. 184-188. Emphasis added.
  5. U.S. Senate. The MX Missile and Associated Basing Decision; Hearing before the Committee on Armed Services; 97th Congress, 2nd Session; December 8, 1982; USGPO, Washington D.C.; 1983: p. 6.
  6. Ibid.: p. 30.
  7. U.S. Senate. U.S. Strategic Doctrine; Hearing Before the Committee on Foreign Relations; 97th Congress, 2nd Session; December 14, 1982; USGPO Washington D.C.; 1983: p. 8.
  8. NYT; 8 December 1982: p. 1.
  9. NYT; 9 December 1982: p. 1
  10. NYT; 31 December 1982: p. 9.
  11. U.S. Senate. The MX Missile and Associated Basing Decision: pp. 28-29
  12. NYT; 9 December 1982: p. 1.
  13. NYT; 8 December 1982: p. 1.
  14. Ibid.
  15. U.S. Senate. The MX Missile and Associated Basing Decision; op. cit.: p. 57.

16. Ibid.
17. Ibid.: pp. 36-37.
18. Ibid.: p. 37.
19. U.S. House of Representatives. Strategic Programs: p. 196.
20. Report of the President's Commission on Strategic Forces; April 1983; USGPO, Washington D.C.; 1983: p. 1.
21. Scowcroft, Brent. Letter to the President, 6 April 1983; In ibid.: p. i.
22. NYT; 4 January 1983: p. 15.
23. Ibid.: p. 1. For a full list of members see Appendix VIII.
24. NYT; 12 April 1983: p. 20.
25. U.S. Senate. The Arms Control and Foreign Policy Implications of the Scowcroft Commission Report; Hearings before the Committee on Foreign Relations; 98th Congress, 1st Session; 11 May 1983; USGPO, Washington D.C.; 1983: p. 2.
26. Max Friedersdorf served as Legislative Liaison, and Herbert Hetu was the PR consultant. NYT; 23 March 1983: p. 1.
27. NYT; 8 January 1983: p. 10.
28. NYT; 10 February 1983: p. 15.
29. Scowcroft; op. cit.: p. i.
30. U.S. Senate. MX Missile Basing System and Related Issues; Hearings before the Committee on Armed Services; 98th Congress, 1st Session; 18 April-3 May 1983; USGPO, Washington D.C.; 1983: pp. 39, 163.
31. NYT; 23 March 1983: p. 1.
32. NYT; 20 April 1983: p. 22.
33. Ibid.
34. U.S. Senate. The Arms' Control and Foreign Policy

- Implications of the Scowcroft Commission Report: p. 1.
35. U.S. Senate. MX Missile Basing System and Related Issues: p. 97.
36. NYT; 26 May 1983: p. 1.
37. Ibid.
38. Report of the President's Commission on Strategic Forces: p. 14.
39. Gelb, Leslie. "As a Bargaining Chip, MX May Be No Bargain For the Soviets," NYT; 24 April 1983: Section IV, p. 1.
40. Report of the President's Commission on Strategic Forces: p. 16.
41. Ibid.: p. 4.
42. Ibid.: p. 22.
43. Testimony of General Scowcroft, in U.S. Senate, Arms Control and Foreign Policy Implications of the Scowcroft Commission Report: pp. 2-4.
44. U.S. Senate. MX Missile Basing System and Related Issues: p. 131.
45. Ibid.: pp. 71, 137.
46. U.S. House of Representatives. Strategic Programs: p. 4. Emphasis added.
47. Ibid.: p. 71.
48. Ibid.: pp. 71, 85.
49. Report of the President's Commission on Strategic Forces: p. 17.
50. Ibid.: pp. 7-8.
51. Ibid.; and U.S. Senate, MX Missile Basing System and Related Issues: pp. 10-11.
52. Bundy, McGeorge. Testimony before the Senate Committee on Armed Services, in U.S. Senate. MX Missile Basing System....: p. 423.

53. U.S. Senate. Arms Control and Foreign Policy Implications of the Scowcroft Commission Report: p. 4.
54. Based on analysis of statements on defense related topics published in Public Papers of the Presidents and the Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents through Monday, March 3, 1986.
55. Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report; Vol. 43, Number 52; 28 December 1985: p. 2748.
56. NYT; 31 October 1985: p. 1.
57. Holsti, Ole R. "Public Opinion and Containment," a paper presented at the National Defense University conference on "Containment and the Future;" Washington D.C.; November 7-8, 1985: Table 4.
58. Reagan, Ronald. "Address to the Nation," 26 February 1986, in Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents; Vol. 22, Number 9; Monday, March 3, 1986: p. 285.
59. Ibid.: p. 287.
60. U.S. Senate, MX Missile Basing System and Related Issues: p. 423.
61. Report of the President's Commission on Strategic Forces: p. 25.
62. U.S. Senate. MX Missile Basing System and Related Issues: p. 96.

## Section V

### Conclusions: The Difficulty of Leading Democracy In Achieving Its "First Duty"

"One need only look back and see how soon foul weather and hidden shoals have driven us off the strategic course...in order to recognize just how difficult it is to lead this representative democracy in achieving its first duty: survival as a free nation."

U.S. Senator Pete Wilson

### 12. The Government, the Mass Media, And The Fragile Nature of the Defense "Consensus"

There is an obvious paradox in the fact that the Scowcroft Commission had to define away the immediacy of the Soviet threat in order to secure support for the program which was originally designed to counter that threat. This paradox stands as eloquent testimony to the difficulties inherent in attempting to answer Lincoln's questions about the point at which Americans should expect the approach of danger and the means by which we should fortify against it.

The Scowcroft Commission concluded its efforts to grapple with these questions by stating the unanimous belief of its members that "a new consensus - requiring a spirit of compromise by us all - is essential if we are to move

toward greater stability and toward reducing the risk of war."<sup>1</sup> Yet as the three cases examined in this study amply illustrate, such a consensus cannot be evoked simply by stating that a need for one exists. The struggles to build consensus in support of the policies of NSC-68, in closing the "missile gap," and in shutting the "window of vulnerability" all point to the fact that there are immense problems to be overcome in the process of setting the national agenda in such a manner as to, in Mr. Jefferson's words, "place before mankind the common sense of the subject, in terms so plain and firm as to command their assent."

The severity of these problems and the frustrations of repeated efforts to resolve them have caused many of those charged with formulating American defense policy to become "disturbed about our capacity as a government to make such decisions."<sup>2</sup> This concern, expressed by House Armed Services Committee Chairman Melvin Price (D-Ill) as he opened hearings into the Carter and Reagan administrations' inability to come to grips with the window of vulnerability, was subsequently echoed by fellow committee member Robin Beard (R-Tenn), who observed that "something is drastically wrong with our system."<sup>3</sup> In the Senate, Armed Services Committee member James Exon (D-Neb) went even further, calling the entire process by which the issue

of American vulnerability was repeatedly placed on the national agenda "a rather devastating indictment of the system of honestly dealing with the people in our decisionmaking process that we call democracy."<sup>4</sup>

Senator Exon had consistently rejected the idea that there was a real "window of vulnerability" confronting the United States, but it was certainly not necessary to share his perception of the nature of the threat in order to share his concern over the manner in which the country attempted to meet that threat. His colleague on the Senate Armed Services Committee, Pete Wilson (R-Cal), had been a strong supporter of the Reagan administration position on this issue, but obviously was equally apprehensive about some aspects of the "decisionmaking process that we call democracy" when he expressed his concern that:

One need only look back and see how soon foul weather and hidden shoals have driven us off the strategic course...in order to recognize just how difficult it is to lead this representative democracy in achieving its first duty: survival as a free nation.

The evidence presented in this study shows conclusively that such concerns about the ability of our democratic society to provide for its own survival are not merely a recent outgrowth of the aftermath of Vietnam and Watergate. The fears expressed by those involved in the drafting of NSC-68 that "in the absence of a real and continuing

crisis, a dictatorship can unquestionably outlast a democracy" because "the very virtues of our system...handicap us in certain respects" testify that Senator Wilson was not the first to recognize "just how difficult it is to lead this representative democracy in achieving its first duty." In a similar vein, the lament of Dr. James Baxter III of the Gaither Committee that "the normal pattern in the United States has been...to fail to discern the impending danger in time, and to prepare too little and too late" indicates that concern over the point at which Americans should expect and fortify against the approach of danger was as much of a factor in the debate over the missile gap as it had been in the drafting of NSC-68 and was to become in the efforts to close the window of vulnerability.

Nevertheless, the three cases examined here provide equally conclusive evidence that, while moving the nation to action in response to the "approach of danger" may prove difficult, it is certainly not impossible. The occasion for Dr. Baxter's remarks was his appearance in 1960 before a special Senate subcommittee commissioned to determine "whether our Government...is properly organized to meet the challenges of the cold war."<sup>6</sup> As Senator Henry Jackson, the chairman of that subcommittee, expressed it, the question confronting his panel was: "How can a free society organize

to outthink, outplan, and outperform totalitarianism and achieve security in freedom?"<sup>7</sup> The findings of Senator Jackson and his fellow Senators reflect precisely the view presented here: that the task of achieving "security in freedom" is difficult but clearly within the realm of possibility. Their concluding statement was drawn from the testimony of Robert Lovett, who, based upon his association with both NSC-68 and the Gaither Committee, affirmed that:

While the challenges [confronting the nation] are most serious in a policy-making sense, there is no reason for black despair or for defeatist doubts as to what our system of government or this country can do. We can do whatever we have to do in order to survive.<sup>8</sup>

The ability to successfully "do whatever we have to do in order to survive" is dependent to a large degree upon the realization that, as the Scowcroft panel pointedly observed, the process of moving a democracy to action is inherently a political process. This apparent truism demands that the political aspects of setting the agenda in such a manner as to facilitate the adoption of the administration's defense program be addressed at the outset of developing that program. A failure to take this requirement into account may well contribute to the overall downfall of the program. This crucial point is dramatically illustrated by comparing the results of the four Presidential commissions charged with developing

policies to meet the threats associated with the three cases examined in this study.

The Gaither Committee and the Townes Committee both either neglected or specifically declined to address the "political" question of how to secure the adoption of the programs they were recommending. In the case of the Gaither Committee, its members failed to build a constituency within the executive branch which would be in a position to carry on with the battle to win support for their proposals after they had submitted their report and gone back to their jobs outside the government. The Townes Committee, in addition to its failure to fully involve the JCS in its planning, specifically rejected considerations of a "political nature" in drafting its conclusions. Neither group was able to gain the full support of even the President who had commissioned it.

The Policy Review Group charged with drafting NSC-68 and the Scowcroft Commission working on the problem of finding a home for the MX missile, however, met the "political problem" head on in their work. It was an integral, if not the primary, consideration in their planning and in the reports which they drafted. Both groups clearly appreciated the fact that, in addition to policy recommendations, the administration would need to be

provided with the appropriate tools to build support for those policies. The Policy Review Group accomplished this task by creating a "work of advocacy" to serve as a "bludgeon" in dealing with the administration, the Congress, and ultimately the public. The Scowcroft Commission devoted its energies to consolidating support among the members of Congress and the JCS in advance of issuing its report, and to providing the means by which the administration could be disentangled from its own rhetoric concerning the window of vulnerability. Subsequently both groups proved successful in winning the endorsement of the executive and the requisite public and Congressional approval to secure adoption of many of their policy recommendations.

Obviously, there are costs associated with making such considerations of whether or not a program lends itself to being used as a "work of advocacy" an integral element in the formulation of national defense policy. On this point, the testimony of General Scowcroft to the Senate Armed Services Committee is illuminating. The members of his Committee were quite open in admitting to the Congress that, had it not been for their considerations of "political feasibility," there were MX basing options which, on technical grounds, they might have preferred over those in their recommendations. General Scowcroft

maintained that, nevertheless, his panel felt that "at this time this solution is an optimum solution." He provided the rationale for the Committee's position in response to a question by Senator John Warner (R-Va.), who asked "if you were to put aside all political considerations...is this basing system the very best from the standpoint of military effectiveness?" In reply, the General explained that "we do not feel that [putting aside political considerations] was an option open to us.... That option was precluded...by the nature of the environment in which this decision has to be made..., which includes elements of political practicality."<sup>9</sup>

Paul Nitze, one of the driving forces behind the successful campaign to sell the policies of NSC-68, has made much the same point in his own description of "national policy planning in the United States." As Mr. Nitze explained in an address to the American Political Science Association in 1959, this process "involves not only that of arriving at a coordinated and authoritative decision, but also the politically essential and often arduous task of marshalling a consensus behind the proposed policy and program." In the course of marshalling such a consensus, he observed, "the policy may be subjected to greater or lesser modifications - perhaps not intellectually ideal modifications, but necessary if the

policy finally decided upon is to command wide enough support to insure its eventual execution."<sup>10</sup>

Both Nitze and Scowcroft would thus agree that developing a national security program which lends itself to being "sold" may preclude certain desirable options. In this, they provide some support to those who, like John Lewis Gaddis, would criticize NSC-68 for being too much a "work of advocacy," or to those like Senator Exon, whose critique of the Scowcroft Commission Report was that it seemed to be "more of a political report or a political consensus than a military one affecting the security of the United States."<sup>11</sup> Both Nitze and Scowcroft would admit that their efforts were indeed works of "advocacy" aimed at building "political consensus." But neither would accept such statements as valid criticisms, given their convictions that such compromises with the "ideal" are necessitated by the need to consider "elements of political practicality" in making foreign policy decisions in the environment of a representative democracy.

It is the necessity to make national security decisions in this environment which makes the process of agenda setting such an important element in each of the three attempts to move the country to action presented here. A strong case can be made, on the basis of the patterns

common to all three cases, that the need to consider designing defense policies which lend themselves to use as works of advocacy stems in large part from the fact that an administration in our open society can never be totally in control of the emergence of the perception of a new threat on the national agenda. In this, the evidence concerning the ability to place a threat on the agenda appears to reaffirm the contention of Bernard Cohen that in our democracy, "the media may be used to sustain the position of any holder of power anywhere in the system; they may be used as effectively against an administration as on behalf of one."<sup>12</sup> While the President has built-in advantages which may facilitate raising the issue of an increased threat to national security to a place of prominence on the national agenda, that clearly has not been translated into a corresponding ability to deny the existence of a threat when others claim it exists.

President Eisenhower's inability to remove the issue of the "missile gap" from the public agenda provides dramatic support for this assertion. While there is no way to determine conclusively what impact the release of the U-2 intelligence data might have had on this situation, the fact remains that the President did not believe that "political practicality" allowed him that option, since he was convinced that "any leak of information either at home

or abroad would compel abandonment" of the entire U-2 project.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, the experience of President Carter in relation to the emergence of the "window of vulnerability" tends to reaffirm the contention that Presidential rejections of claims that a threat exists are not sufficient to preclude the emergence of that threat as an issue on the public agenda. The fact that the Carter administration itself ultimately contributed to the growth of the public perception that the Soviets were striving for strategic superiority does not change the fact that the issue of American strategic vulnerability was originally in direct competition with the image which the President wished to convey about U.S.-Soviet relations. Even in the case of NSC-68, when the Truman administration came to accept the existence of a growing Soviet threat as the basis for its defense program, it is worth noting that the rise of that threat was originally placed on the national agenda in conflict with the defense spending priorities being articulated by the President and his Secretary of Defense. In the process of determining "at what point we Americans should expect the approach of danger," the evidence of the three case studies presented here thus clearly supports columnist James Reston's contention that the President may be able to disarm his critics, but not silence them.<sup>14</sup>

It is one of the most striking findings of this study, however, that this situation does not carry over into the process of determining "by what means we should fortify against" the approach of danger. While a threat may be placed on the media and public agendas by "any holder of power anywhere in the system," the ability to construct a consensus in support of defense initiatives designed to meet that threat would appear to demand the active participation of the President. The "bludgeon" of NSC-68 was used effectively by the Truman administration and its supporters in securing the adoption of defense proposals to expand the size of the U.S. military, dispatch troops to Europe to serve with NATO, and provide increased foreign military assistance to our allies. However, the Gaither Committee Report, with language virtually identical to that used in NSC-68 concerning the danger of the growth of Soviet military power, was unable to forge a consensus in support of a rapid expansion of the American ICBM force in the aftermath of Sputnik. The critical missing link was the absence of Presidential support. The report itself was given tremendous publicity as members of the Gaither Committee leaked its substance to the press, and it served as ammunition in an intense Congressional debate. But as Gaither Committee co-chairman Robert Sprague was forced to admit after several years of attempting to gain support for

his committee's recommendations, when it comes to building a consensus strong enough to compel the adoption of a defense initiative designed to move the nation to action, "there is one man in the United States that can do this effectively, and that is the President. I do not think there is anybody else."<sup>15</sup>

The same situation existed in relation to the window of vulnerability during the Carter administration. While the Team-B intelligence assessment and the coalition of groups associated with the Committee on the Present Danger were able to keep the issue of the Soviet threat on the public agenda, they were unable to compel support for a program which would effectively "shut" the window. As had been the case with the Gaither Committee report and the missile gap, without the support of the President the focus of efforts to move the country to action shifted to the Congressional and public arenas. Yet in each of these arenas, the prime contenders were ultimately forced to admit the need for Presidential leadership if their efforts were to prove successful. As the Coalition for a Democratic Majority proclaimed in regard to the public arena, "the will of the people cannot be mobilized unless the President... [addresse] these issues with words and deeds adequate to their gravity."<sup>16</sup> Senator Sam Nunn (D-Ga.) made virtually the identical point in relation to the ongoing

Congressional debates, calling upon the President to "lead a campaign to persuade Congress and the public that the United States should significantly increase defense spending" because "only the President of the United States is capable of making this case to the American people."<sup>17</sup>

The circumstances surrounding both the missile gap and the window of vulnerability provide additional support for this contention, since in each case, once an administration committed to responding to the threat came to office, policies were adopted which ultimately succeeded in removing the threat from the public agenda. In part, Presidents Kennedy and Reagan were able to "define away" the threats on which they had campaigned because they were also able to foster public perceptions that they were simultaneously pursuing policies which would "close" the gaps or windows involved if they did exist. For John Kennedy, this proved to be relatively easy to accomplish. All that was necessary was to accelerate programs for ICBM construction already underway during the Eisenhower administration. The Reagan administration found its task to be somewhat more complicated, since the President specifically had rejected the ICBM modernization program called for by the Carter administration during the election campaign. As a result, President Reagan was unable to secure the immediate passage of a program to close the

window of vulnerability by taking advantage of the public and Congressional support for an increased defense effort which accompanied his election. He subsequently required the efforts of the Scowcroft Commission to disentangle him from his own rhetoric on the issue. Nevertheless, President Reagan was ultimately able to secure, as had Kennedy before him, adoption of defense programs which had proven to be beyond the grasp of those who had sought them without the support of the President.

This demonstrable impact of Presidential support on the process of moving the country to action in response to perceptions of the "approach of danger" stands in stark contrast to the claim of Theodore H. White, quoted at the outset of this study, that "when the press seizes a great issue to thrust onto the agenda, it moves action on its own."<sup>18</sup> At the same time, it would not be precisely correct to claim, as does former State Department spokesman Hodding Carter, that there is "not one major American problem which the press anticipated and set on the national agenda, as opposed to running behind and trying to catch up after it surfaced."<sup>19</sup> Instead, the pattern which emerges from the three cases examined in this study points to a process of agenda setting in which the mass media play a significant role in establishing an order of priorities among competing agenda items by publicizing the values articulated by

others.<sup>20</sup>

The "others" involved in the agendas associated with NSC-68, the missile gap, and the window of vulnerability have spanned a wide range of political actors, and these are not limited to those within the American government. The leadership and media of the Soviet Union have been included, along with opinion elites in this country (such as the two Committees on the Present Danger), dissenters from administration policy within the executive branch and the armed services, members of Congress and their staffs, administration spokesmen, the President himself, and even some influential news columnists. The media, of course, also publicize their own values in the form of editorial columns, but by and large such efforts have proven less effective in influencing the national agenda than the values reflected in front page news coverage. As George Gallup observed in writing about the relationship between the public and American foreign policy, "the record reveals the powerful impact of events on public opinion."<sup>21</sup> James Reston concurs, noting that:

Newspapers, radio, and television...in the United States influence foreign policy mainly by reporting the actions [of others].... Acts are more powerful than words in this field, and news more influential than opinion. Most of the time, reporters are in the distributing business, transmitting the accounts of what Presidents and Secretaries of States do onto the front pages and into the top headlines, where they undoubtedly

influence public opinion. "Let me make the news," President Roosevelt said in effect, "and you can write all the editorials you like against it."<sup>22</sup>

Given the vast number of actors in addition to the President who have demonstrated the capability to "make the news" in relation to the emergence of an increase in the Soviet threat, it is not surprising that the mass media's role in "publicizing the values of others" has resulted in the press' becoming an arena for agendas in conflict in each of the three cases studied here. Starting within the executive branch, each example of the rise of a new Soviet threat has resulted in conflict between the budget and defense agendas being reported in the media. Externally, Soviet propaganda served to heighten the sense of a threat in conflict with earlier administration positions during the debates over NSC-68 and the missile gap. The Kremlin's propaganda efforts subsequently were used in an attempt to play down the existence of the threat associated with the window of vulnerability, in direct competition with the agendas of the Reagan administration and the latter years of the Carter administration. In addition to such propaganda campaigns, Soviet actions in the arena of international affairs also contributed to the process of agenda setting associated with NSC-68, the missile gap, and the window of vulnerability, as attested to by the impact of Korea, Sputnik, and Afghanistan.

Despite repeated calls for a "bipartisan consensus" to meet each threat, conflicting agendas were also advanced in highly partisan political debates which accompanied all three cases. Truman faced the "Great Debate" over his defense policies throughout the first three quarters of 1951. Eisenhower confronted a hostile Congress controlled by the opposition party throughout the period of the missile gap, and it was through hearings conducted by the Democratic leaders of that Congress that the issue of the gap was kept alive until the 1960 Presidential election campaign. Finally, in the debates over the window of vulnerability, the Republican party took the unusual step of publicly repudiating the very notion of "bipartisanship" in foreign policy in order to lay the groundwork for attacking the Carter administration on defense issues in the upcoming elections.

As if additional input into the already crowded field of those seeking to influence the national agenda was necessary, in each case powerful opinion elites either were engaged in providing support for an agenda already being considered (as was the case with the first Committee on the Present Danger), or introduced their own competing agenda for action (as was the case with the Alsop columns during the early stages of the missile gap and the second

Committee on the Present Danger during the Carter administration). A comparison of the effectiveness of the two Committees on the Present Danger strongly suggests that such groups are more likely to generate a favorable media response when they are supporting the administration's agenda than when they are opposing it, but an association with competing factions involved in Congressional debate can also serve to raise the agenda items of such groups to a level at which they command national attention.

One consequence of this barrage of conflicting agenda items presented through the media in efforts to gain public support has been the bombardment of the American public with a tremendous amount of information and disinformation concerning each of the postulated periods of peril considered here. Despite the concerted efforts of most of those involved in "generating the news" to, in the words of Dean Acheson, "make their points clearer than truth," the overall pattern of media coverage has not reflected the degree of "oversimplification" often attributed to foreign affairs coverage by the American press. To the contrary, the vast amount of coverage devoted to explaining the multitude of conflicting agenda positions has at times appeared to contribute to confusing the public.

This has been especially true when the administration in

power has been unable to bring a sense of unity to its own foreign policy agenda. In each of the cases considered here, the appearance of confusion within the agenda presented to the public by the mass media has been most closely associated with a corresponding degree of confusion regarding the governmental agenda. As Senator Henry Jackson explained in the course of his investigation into the organization of the American government in relation to national security, "unless our top officials are in basic agreement about what is paramount for the national interest - what comes first and what comes second - there is bound to be drift and confusion below. This has been so under every administration."<sup>23</sup> It was certainly true of the Truman administration prior to the unifying impact of the dual bludgeons of NSC-68 and Korea. It was a problem for the entire second term of the Eisenhower administration, as military leaders competing for limited defense funding repeatedly took their claims of a missile gap to the public. The Carter administration's inability to come to grips with whether or not there was, or would soon be, a window of vulnerability was reflected both in the public statements of ranking administration spokesmen (including, at times, the President himself) and in public confusion over whether or not the President was being "tough enough" in his dealings with the Soviet Union. Finally, the Reagan

administration's apparent confusion over which basing mode it was going to endorse for the MX missile was sufficient to "fritter away" the possibility of using public support for efforts to close the window of vulnerability as a "bludgeon" to compel Congressional acceptance of full scale deployment of the new ICBM.

As the Scowcroft Commission grappled with the problem of finding some way to salvage the MX from this situation, its members were well aware of the problems such confusion over the national agenda could cause if left unresolved. "Only if Americans believe that it is worth a sustained effort over the years to preserve liberty in the face of a challenge by a system that is the antithesis of liberal values can our task be seen as a just and worthy one in spite of its dangers," they wrote. "What we have most to fear," their report continued, "is that confusion and internal divisions - sometimes the byproducts of the vigorous play of our free politics - will lead us to lose purpose, hope, and resolve."<sup>24</sup> This is virtually the same sentiment which inspired the drafters of NSC-68 to make their points "clearer than truth," and which motivated President Eisenhower to lament that "the ceaseless and usually healthy self-criticism in which we of the United States indulge had brought a measure of genuine self-doubt" as a result of the "stimulus for public uncertainty"

provided by Sputnik and recurrent charges of a missile gap.<sup>25</sup>

It is a feature of our democratic society that such "confusion and internal divisions," "self doubt," and "public uncertainty" are most susceptible to resolution through strong executive leadership. In fact, the evidence from the studies presented here suggests that there is no other source within our political system which can be counted upon to bring unity to the national agenda in the course of determining "by what means we should fortify against the approach of danger." In the Congressional debate over the window of vulnerability, Representative Dan Daniel (D-Va.) addressed this need by quoting from I Corinthians 14:8: "Who will prepare for the battle," he asked, "if the trumpet sounds an uncertain note?"<sup>26</sup> In the process of setting the national agenda in such a manner as to compel the adoption of defense initiatives which will move the country to act in the face of an approaching threat, that trumpet must be sounded by the executive branch, as it was in the case of NSC-68.

It is the success of the Truman administration in "selling" the policies of NSC-68 which provides the benchmark against which the remaining two cases in this study must be judged. In the aftermath of the invasion of Korea

and the President's formal endorsement of NSC-68, the Truman administration did indeed sound a "certain note." By using the language of NSC-68 as the core of its campaign to bring order to the national agenda, the administration was able to successfully lead the development of media and public perceptions about both the nature of the threat and the desired solution to that threat. However, no parallel to the degree of consensus reflected in the agenda presented in the mass media during the "Great Debate" emerged in the course of the debates over the missile gap or the window of vulnerability. The evidence associated with both of these latter two "threats" strongly indicates that this lack of media consensus was not the result of any dramatic shift in the manner in which the media perform their jobs, Vietnam and Watergate notwithstanding. In the entire period under study, there is not a single instance in which a statement by the President on national defense issues failed to produce a corresponding article giving prominent coverage to that statement in the mass media.<sup>27</sup> Instead, the lack of consensus reflected in the media coverage of efforts to resolve both the missile gap and the window of vulnerability almost exactly parallels a corresponding lack of consensus among statements originating within the government concerning these same issues.

Douglass Cater, who described the press as "the fourth branch of government," has remarked that where leadership is fragmented or frayed, "public opinion is called upon more regularly than elsewhere to act as an arbiter among competing policies and politicians."<sup>28</sup> Such would clearly appear to have been an accurate description of the state of executive leadership during the debates over the missile gap and the window of vulnerability. However, the evidence presented here would indicate that it simply is not reasonable to expect the media or the public to bring order to an agenda that lacks order as it is presented by the government. As Walter Lippmann observed in 1922, the press cannot serve as a substitute for leadership through our national institutions.<sup>29</sup>

This point was vividly underlined by the conclusions of a special study conducted on behalf of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund in 1959. In an analysis of the ability of the democratic process to meet what was described as "the mid-century challenge to US foreign policy," the report advanced the proposition that:

The real problem with regard to participation of the citizens comes...from significant failures and misconceptions in regard to leadership. Public opinion cannot operate in a disorganized and inchoate way on foreign policy. What leadership must do - and what it has too often failed to do - is to determine the issues of public discussion. It must create the frame of reference within which popular choices take place

and indicate the directions in which they lead.<sup>30</sup>

The process of agenda setting which has been the focal point of this study is precisely the process through which the government must act if such a frame of reference is to be established. While the relationship which the cases presented here have revealed between the government and the media in setting the national agenda is complex and often cumbersome, the evidence does not point to the existence of any "fatal flaws" in the agenda setting process which would preclude moving the country to action in the face of a threat to our national survival. The critical element is leadership in bringing a semblance of order to the manner in which the answers to Lincoln's questions concerning the point at which we Americans should expect the approach of danger and the means by which we should fortify against it are placed on the national agenda. In this, the conclusions of this study and the conclusions of NSC-68 are in complete agreement: the initiative in this process lies with the government.

Notes for Chapter 12

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1. Report of the President's Commission on Strategic Forces; April 1983; USGPO, Washington D.C.; 1983: p. 25.
  2. U.S. House of Representatives. Strategic Programs; Hearings before the Committee on Armed Services; 97th Congress, 2nd Session; 6 October 1981-1 March 1982; USGPO Washington D.C.; 1982: p. 1.
  3. Ibid.: p. 17.
  4. U.S. Senate. MX Missile Basing System and Related Issues; Hearings before the Committee on Armed Services; 98th Congress, 1st Session; 18 April - 3 May 1983; USGPO, Washington D.C.; 1983: p. 323.
  5. Wilson, Pete. "The President's Foundering Strategic Modernization Plan," in Strategic Review; Vol. XIII, No. 3 (Summer 1985): p. 13.
  6. U.S. Senate. Organizing for National Security; Hearings before the Subcommittee on National Policy Machinery of the Committee on Government Operations; USGPO, Washington D.C.; 1961: Vol. 1, p. 1.
  7. Ibid..
  8. Ibid.: Vol. 3, p. 8.
  9. U.S. Senate. MX Missile Basing System and Related Issues; op. cit.: pp. 8, 19.
  10. Nitze, Paul H. "Organization for National Policy Planning in the United States," in U.S. Senate, Organizing for National Security; op. cit.: Vol. 2 (Studies and Background Materials), p. 283.
  11. The Gaddis criticism is found in Strategies of Containment; op. cit.: p. 106; Senator Exon's remarks are from the U.S. Senate, MX Missile Basing System and Related

Issues; op. cit.: p. 17.

12. See Chapter 1, p. 21.

13. Eisenhower, Dwight D. Waging Peace; Doubleday & Company, Garden City, N.Y.; 1965: p. 544.

14. See Chapter 7: The reference is to a comment in Reston's column in the NYT of 10 January 1958: p. 1.

15. See Chapter 6: The quote is from Sprague's testimony in U.S. Senate, Organizing for National Security: Vol. 1, pp. 55-56.

16. See Chapter 9: the quote is from the Coalition for a Democratic Majority's For an Adequate Defense; op. cit.: p. 31.

17. Nunn, Sam. Speech on the Senate floor, 7 September 1979: quoted in NYT; 8 September 1979: p. 6.

18. See Chapter 1: The quote is from T.H. White, The Making of the President, 1972; op. cit.: p. 327.

19. Carter, Hodding. Opening statement to the Modern Media Institute Ethics Center Seminar on "The Adversary Press," in The Adversary Press; Modern Media Institute, St. Petersburg, Florida; 1983: p. 34.

20. This view closely parallels the conclusions of Denis McQuail in "The Influence and Effects of Mass Media," (originally published in 1977); in Graber, Doris (ed.). Media Power in Politics; Congressional Quarterly Press, Washington D.C.; 1984: p. 45.

21. Gallup, George. Forward to Ralph Levering's The Public and American Foreign Policy; Wm. Marrow & Co., N.Y.; 1978: p. 9. Emphasis in original.

22. Reston, James. The Artillery of the Press: Its Influence on Foreign Policy; Harper & Row, N.Y.; 1966-1967: p. 63.

23. U.S. Senate. Organizing For National Security; op. cit.: Vol. 3, p. 4.

24. Report of the President's Commission on Strategic Forces; op. cit.: pp. 1-2.

25. See Chapter 6: from Eisenhower, Waging Peace: p. 226.

26. U.S. House of Representatives. Strategic Programs; op. cit.: pp. 237-238.
27. Based on a comparison of indexed references to defense posture, defense spending, missiles, ICBMs, and Soviet missiles/defense in the Public Papers of the Presidents and headline coverage in the NYT and Washington Post for 1949-1952, 1956-1961, and 1976-1983.
28. Quoted in The Adversary Press: p. 6.
29. Lippmann, Walter. "The Nature of News," reprinted from Public Opinion; Free Press; New York; 1922, in Graber, Media Power in Politics; op. cit.: p. 78-79.
30. The Rockefeller Brothers Fund Special Studies Project. The Mid Century Challenge to US Foreign Policy; Doubleday & Company; Garden City, N.Y.; 1959: p. 64.

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